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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY, Boston and New York.

## THE STORY

OF

# LAWRENCE GARTHE

 $\mathbf{B}\mathbf{Y}$ 

## ELLEN OLNEY KIRK

AUTHOR OF "QUEEN MONEY," "MARGARET KENT," ETC.



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
(The Kiverside Press, Cambridge

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A. Electrotyped and Printed by H. O. Houghton and Company.

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# THE STORY OF LAWRENCE GARTHE.

## CHAPTER I.

#### A DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE ladies were expected every moment; so the servant at the door of Mrs. Garner's house on Lexington Avenue told Ferdinand Hartley. Accordingly, saying that he would await their return, he entered the drawing-room, which was lighted by a great lamp, with a flame-colored shade, and an open fire of coals, sat down in a low chair, put his hat on the floor, and congratulated himself on this quiet interval, which offered him a chance to marshal his ideas in fair and logical order and decide upon his plan of action. It was, however, no easy matter to concentrate his thoughts. He could hardly account for his own nervousness. Twice in his life before he had made an offer of marriage, in each experience meeting a sharp reverse; but in those cases he had touched upon the subject in cold blood, had attempted to rouse ardor when he had no ardor himself. Now he had no reason for misgiving, for he was absolutely sincere. He had long looked the confession he had not permitted himself to utter in words, and was assured of success. He could not understand why his heart was beating rapidly when he ought to have been calm and self-possessed, like the man of the world he aimed to be. But then, who except a mechanical puppet is ever, to his own consciousness, a man of the world?

Hartley possessed, in general, much happy dexterity in playing any rôle he assumed. He was thirty years of age, extremely handsome, with dark, laughing blue eyes, curly brown hair, a closely clipped beard trimmed neatly to a point; and, without any fatuous air of vanity, gave an impression, not only of feeling in high good humor with himself, but of being used to the good opinion of his neighbors. His parents had been New Yorkers. His one sister was well married in the city. He was no unknown adventurer compelled to prove to the world that he was worth acceptance socially. He had always been accepted, was part and parcel of society, reckoned on everywhere and made room for. At this moment he still wore a bridal favor in his buttonhole, having been best man at a wedding; but he had been asked more than once during the afternoon if anything had gone wrong, - what was troubling him. He himself had been conscious of being out of spirits, ill at ease. The truth was, his peace of mind had been spoiled by his glimpse of Mrs. Garner at the reception, her little head in air as she stood surrounded by a group of men, her charming face aglow, her blue eyes aflame, as she poured out, with the spontaneity and effervescence which characterized her, a flood of talk which seemed to delight her auditors. Hartley, held at his post, tied by the leg as it were, had been constrained to look on perturbed by jealousy, and the moment he could get away had followed her home.

He had visited intimately at this house for almost two years, and everything in these rooms, the chairs, the sofas, the little desk, strewn with silver implements and delicately bordered mourning paper, the palms in the great china jars, the chrysanthemums in the crystal bowls, were as familiar as his own belongings. What an opportunity his had been, and how incomprehensible it seemed now that he had not made use of his unique advantages! He had become acquainted with Mrs. Garner and her step-daughter, Constance, while they were still in the deepest mourning, secluded from the world, always at home, always together, - like Helena and Hermia as they created both one flower, "both warbling of one song." Perhaps the reason Hartley had lingered and loitered along the pleasant road of easy intimacy was that his heart, although touched on the instant, had not been fixed. He had felt their interfused charm, and had made the most of that exquisite pause of time which a man experiences in halting before two women whom he admires equally.

Still he was not, in general, a man given to

vague romantic longings. He knew what he longed for, and was ready to discard fancies and motives which were not supreme. Thus he had used his insight, his powers of observation, and had gradually come to the conclusion that it was Mrs. Garner whom he wished to marry. He could not feel certain that Constance was conquerable, while he believed that Kathleen was. At this moment, while he waited, his mind was taken up with recollections, images, forecasts, all of which pointed to the conclusion that he had touched her heart. But why had he left himself at the mercy of events instead of himself appointing them? He seemed, until to-day, to have forgotten that he could have rivals, and had trusted altogether to the chapter of chances. He had come determined to end his uncertainty.

The hall clock struck the half hour past five, and in another moment Mrs. Garner and her step-daughter entered, full of apologies for their tardiness. They had gone on from the wedding to take a cup of tea with Mrs. Challoner, and talk it over. Mr. Marchmont had come in, and afterwards had walked home with them in the twilight of the late November day.

"I did not see John Marchmont at the wedding," said Hartley.

"He says he never goes to weddings," explained Mrs. Garner, speaking always in the same sweet veiled Southern voice. "He says he never even reads marriage notices, — that they make him so

envious he tears his hair and rages generally. I tell him he idealizes the thing; that there is an immense amount of illusion about it. Still, how delightful it all was," she sighed, dropping, as she spoke, into her favorite corner of the sofa and pulling off her gloves. "It has put a thousand new ideas into my head. I have lost all sense of my own individuality. I keep saying to myself, 'Why am I not exactly eighteen?' 'Why am I not coming out this season?' 'Why was it not I who was married to-day and setting off on a wedding journey, with great trunks full of beautiful new gowns!'"

"Wonderful unanimity of feeling!" put in Hartley. "I wanted it to be my wedding day. I wanted to be setting off on a wedding journey."

Her blue eyes regarded him pensively a moment; then she went on: "So many sensations rushing together at once quite intoxicated me. But you see I had quite forgotten how agreeable society is. I had been absolutely contented shut up here with Constance, getting through two pages of German a day, practicing Schumann, and reading the Elizabethan poets. I was beginning to feel myself a person of rather superior tastes, bent on culture. But the moment I walked up the church aisle and heard the organ playing the overture to Tannhäuser, I knew that my intellectuality was all a pretense. Constance may like ideas, but what I care about is people, — the new gowns the women have on, the kind of flowers men wear in their buttonholes;

how they all look, stand, sit, shake hands; above all, what they are all talking about."

"Everybody at the wedding was talking about you and Miss Constance," said Hartley. "The bride had no chance at all. Even the bridegroom was saying what a pleasure it was to see you both out again."

"Yes, everybody was talking about us; and could

any subject be more interesting?"

"Unluckily, it will soon be exhausted," said Constance. "There is only one possible first appearance."

Both women were attractive, and both had sweet voices. Mrs. Garner's was delicate in inflection and in quality of tone; but from her habit of dropping the final consonants of certain words and changing the values of the vowels, the effect, although musical, was blurred and a little indistinct. Constance, on the other hand, spoke invariably in a very soft, but clear and deliberate voice, with a peculiar effect of finish to her least phrase. Mrs. Garner was very fair in complexion, with light, fluffy hair of a beautiful shade, large blue eyes, a sensitive pair of lips, a fitful color and a charming smile. In manner she was by turns possessed by an invincible shyness which seemed to bind her hand and foot and to forbid her raising her eyes from the floor, and carried away by her high spirits to the very verge of audacity. Although she was five years older than her step-daughter, from the

aerial effect of her hair and coloring she looked younger. Constance wore her dark hair drawn straight away from her low, broad forehead and temples; her eyes were dark beneath very level brows, and she had a sweet, serious face with a peculiarly earnest, childish way of looking squarely at the person she addressed or listened to. This childish simplicity of glance was combined with a childish integrity of manner. One had invariably a sense of her thinking out her own thoughts from her own instincts and beliefs, and the occasional soft glow and vehemence, which at times endowed her with magnetic charm, seemed to come from a real inner fire of feeling. Subtleties apart, the way she spoke and met the speech of others showed instant sympathy and intelligence. Both she and Mrs. Garner were in plain black gowns of artistic fit with little bonnets of jet, but in neither case was the sombre attire unbecoming.

"This is actually Constance's coming out, you know, Mr. Hartley," Mrs. Garner continued. "Five years ago she was to have had a grand début, but her sister, Mrs. Goddard, was ill all that autumn and winter. Then the next October our deluge came, and everything in this house was at an end. If I could do what I liked I should give her a tea, a series of dinners, and a ball. But then I never can do what I like."

"In this instance I am glad you cannot," Constance struck in on the instant. "The idea of a

girl of twenty-four having a ball! It would be like offering me a rattle box and coral because I happened to have been neglected in my infancy."

"You see Constance has no illusions about society," said Mrs. Garner. "She sees things exactly as they are. Mr. Marchmont insists that I never do,—that my way is to seize some idea which pleases me, put a halo round it, and call it a fact."

"I hope that description applies to me," said Hartley, feeling as if, in spite of his virile determination to assert himself, he was a mere eddy carried

away by the race of this full stream.

Mrs. Garner at first looked inquisitive, then blushed, and dropped her eyes, and, as if hurrying away from a personal subject, proceeded: "I was telling Mrs. Challoner about the wedding presents, for being cousins we were admitted to the private view yesterday. Thirteen sets of costly plates and nine silver chafing-dishes! I could perceive that Constance was just a little shocked that I should have counted the plates and chafing-dishes, not to say the afternoon tea-sets and twenty other things in profusion! What strikes me dumb with awe, she regards as nothing in particular. her she is like Princess Clotilde at the court of Napoleon Third, who, when the Empress remarked upon her taking all the high ceremonials without making a fuss, replied, 'Mais j'y suis habituée!' After all, unless somebody is to be surprised by it,

what is the use of such splendor? There could be no fun at all in vain shows unless society were reinforced constantly by nouveaux riches and parvenus like me, ready to fall down and worship Sèvres plates and silver chafing-dishes. Now I enjoy a well-dressed crowd to the very tips of my fingers, - men with no shininess about the seams or bagginess at the knees, and women with gowns you may venture to inspect in any light without a painful conviction that they have been turned inside out or upside down. There is nothing blasé about me! When I go out to dinner, I fairly gloat on the idea that there will be at least six courses and that the supply of forks and spoons will never run out. For you see, Mr. Hartley, I was brought up in a reduced way. We had traditions of our grandeur 'befo' de wah,' but who can live on traditions? We had a few bits of rare china and of battered silver, to be sure, but only just enough to show me the solid comfort of having thirteen sets of dinner plates and nine silver chafing-dishes."

To indicate the dropping of certain syllables and the broadening inflection given to others, would be to caricature what was a mere suggestion of imperfect speech, seeming partly the result of an admixture of Southern dialect, and partly the effect of the soft impetuosity of the speaker, whose way it was to throw herself into any subject which engaged her and permit it to run away with her.

"At this moment," she went on, "I am the

vainest and most worldly person in the world. I am going to put on the most becoming gown you can possibly imagine and go to dine at the Windsor."

Hartley tried to retain command of his features, lest they should express too much of his disappointment and chagrin. He rose to his feet. "I fear," he exclaimed, "that I have been detaining you."

"Not in the least," said Constance, with instant decision, "I am not asked. It is a party of Kathy's Virginia friends. If you will excuse her, perhaps she had better go and dress, and you can put her in the carriage when she comes down."

Hartley went on stammering apologies. He had only dropped in; twice he had been upon the point of taking leave; that he had lingered was a tribute to Mrs. Garner's eloquence.

"But you are not to go," said Constance. "Kathy is such a monopolist I have had no time to ask you a question or to tell you our plans. Now, Kathy, run away and put on that new gown."

Kathleen, dropping, as she stood up, her gloves, handkerchief, fan, and wraps, shyly held out her hand to Hartley, murmuring with an appealing glance, "You will forgive me this once?"

He stooped, picked up her belongings, and in his easy, pleasant way, crossed the room at her side, carrying them to the foot of the staircase, where he detained her a moment, saying, while he looked up into her face as she stood on the third step:—

"All the same, I do not approve of your going to dine at the Windsor with a crowd of strange people."

"Why not?" she inquired, with an abashed glance as if conscious of committing a fault.

"Because I do not like to have you go and dine at the Windsor with strange people, and I think your conscience, if you have any, ought to tell you why."

"They are very old friends," she pleaded, humbly. "They have just got back from Europe, they —"

"All the same I do not like it. It spoils my peace of mind. Do you hear? I do not like it! I do not like it!"

He held her hand as he spoke, and looked up into her eyes with a bright, laughing glance, and in the smile that lurked about his lips there was tenderness and good humor.

"But I must go," she faltered; "I have promised."

"Then go," he said, with a peculiar soft flash of his blue eyes, then with a swift movement carried her hand to his lips before he released it. "Only," he added as he put her mantle and gloves into her extended arms, "don't dare to have a good conscience."

And after gazing at her as she slowly ascended, turning at the landing to give him a last look full of contrition, he went back to the drawingroom, a little elated, feeling certain that in spite of his disappointment he had been able to score a point.

"You are a person whose least word is law to me. If you wish me to go I will go. If I may stay half an hour that will be a very great pleasure."

For, his mind still revolving upon his own project, it had suddenly occurred to him that perhaps the best thing for him to do might be to take the girl into his confidence and ask her to give him her aid and comfort in his love affair. No sooner had this idea presented itself than he saw in it every advantage. Even if Constance had not actively favored his suit to her step-mother, passively she had done so again and again. He was certain that he could at least count upon her sympathy.

"I asked you to stay," she said. "Sit down. I cannot ask you to dine with me, because I do not expect to have any dinner; but at eight o'clock I shall have a modest meal of some description, if you care to share it. I wanted to tell you about our plans, for having at last crossed the Rubicon we are to go everywhere and do everything. We shall send out our cards for Tuesdays in December and January, and then in a quiet way, once a fortnight, we shall give a little dinner."

He had not sat down, but was standing before her, leaning on the back of a high chair. Her upturned eyes were fixed on him; she was smiling; there was nothing in her words or in her look to suggest any meaning beyond this unimportant announcement, yet his instinct was quick, and he divined that something else was to be told which concerned himself.

He expressed his pleasure at hearing that their seclusion was over. "Although," he went on, bending towards her, "I half begrudge other people the chance of coming and going here. This friendship has counted for a great deal in my life, and I should be jealous of being entirely superseded."

"It has been very pleasant to us to have you come," said Constance. She sighed. "I feel as if no other life were possible except that we have been living here. This house seems part of myself. It is something to shudder at, I think, that by this time next year Kathy and I must have given it all up."

Hartley looked at her, startled. "I do not quite understand," he murmured. "The house is yours, is it not?"

"My grandfather gave it to my mother and her children," Constance replied. "Papa had only a life interest in it. It belongs to my two sisters and to my two brothers besides myself. Considering that they are none of them rich people, they have been very generous in permitting Kathy and me to go on in just the old way. At first, after papa's death, when it was decided that we should keep it for five years, it seemed a whole lifetime. We look at each other now and wonder where it

has vanished. The reason why we are launching into gayeties is that we feel it important to make the most of our little day of sunshine."

Hartley's surprise was so naïve that he could hardly manage the simplest phrase of sympathy or common interest. He had always taken it for granted that the Garners were solidly rich people. Could it be — No, it was impossible that he should have made such a mistake. His mind was so busy in sifting the probabilities of the situation that he forgot to speak.

"I have a little money," Constance now said, "and if the house is sold I shall have a little more. But Kathy, poor, dear, beautiful Kathy, is cruelly placed."

Their eyes met. "Do you mean —" he faltered out, but his lips refused to form another word. His throat and mouth were dry as parchment.

"That is what I mean," Constance said with extreme gentleness, and he knew that his disappointment, his chagrin, his whole shock of feeling were an open page to her. "I feel sometimes that I am in fault for having tried to keep up the fiction of our being well off. But loving papa as I did, honoring his memory as I wish to do, can you wonder that I have tried to conceal the fact that he left his young wife wholly unprovided for? He had made a good income, but we had lived expensively, and he had provided generously for my brothers and sisters. You see, Mr. Hartley, he was as

sure of his life as if he had been a very young man. More than once he had said to me, 'I have done well by the others; now I must begin to save for you and Kathy.' Then in a moment it was all over."

Hartley himself, experiencing the awful suddenness of the wreck of mortal hopes, contrived to mutter, "I remember how unexpected it was." It seemed to him as if a knot was tied in his throat. He could have wept in indignation, in self-pity, in his sense of utter humiliation before this proud, sensitive girl.

"Of course," she went on, "whatever I have, Kathy has. She will not suffer. She has indeed no clear idea that she is so poor. I feel as if I could not have her saddened and perplexed by the actual truth of things. It takes very little to make her happy,— it also takes very little to make her unhappy."

"How good you are to her!" Hartley murmured.

"It would be impossible for me to be good enough to her," said Constance, all aglow and with a soft vehemence of manner. "If only I had something to give up to her! The others cannot feel as I do. They were older, and were inclined to be a little skeptical and ironical about papa's marrying a wife thirty years younger than himself."

The situation, which had at first left Hartley's

perceptions hazy, confused, inert, began to clear. Up to this moment he had thought only of himself; it now occurred to him that he ought to express some sympathy for Kathy as well.

"It seems hard for Mrs. Garner," he remarked, with an effort to detach himself from any personal point of view and assume his usual ease of manner. "Destiny will soon set things right for her again, however. She is certain to marry again."

Constance's head drooped.

"That is what my brothers say," she returned, speaking for once in an almost indistinguishable voice, "and I - I hope she may marry some good man, - some disinterested man."

The clock in the hall struck the half hour. Hartley straightened himself. "I wish," he said in an odd voice, "that I were a disinterested man. I should like to experience the emancipation of mind, heart and soul a million of dollars would give me. If I were a rich man I could be a disinterested man instead of the sordid wretch I am."

The glow and fire of her face startled him as she raised her eyes.

"I hope," she cried, "you have not misunderstood me."

"No, I have not misunderstood you." He went up to her and held out his hand. "Thank you for telling me this," he murmured, with at least an affectation of frank emotion. "You are a brave girl."

"Kathy has no one else to look after her," she answered. "Sometimes I am horribly anxious about her future."

"I see," he said. He looked down at the proud childlike face, beautiful in its courage and its self-control. After all, it was this girl with whom he was actually in love, he said to himself, only he had always experienced a sense of being unable to meet her demands upon him,—he was inadequate; his best performances fell below her mark. With her, life was something serious, passionate, sincere. He was struck anew by the modest, truthful charm of the face, of the youthful stateliness with which she rose.

"Shall I ever come again?" he asked humbly.

"Of course come," she said with some imperiousness. "We are good friends, always good friends."

"Thank you," he said ardently, as if intensely grateful. "Good-night." He was leaving the room; then at the door he turned back, and added, "I hope Mrs. Garner will enjoy her dinner."

He stopped for a moment in the hall to pick up his light overcoat, fling it across his arm, and in another moment experienced the relief of the outside coolness and darkness.

His whole wish had been to get away. He was miserably conscious, not only that his speech and action had been mechanical, but that whatever passion, love, pity, tenderness, hope, courage, even common charity, had ever seemed to have existence in his relations with Kathleen Garner, had failed in this crisis. Not enough emotion of any sort was left to give the requisite impulse for a manly and helpful word. What he had experienced was a startled sense of escape, such as a man might feel when, just as he is about to cross a bridge, he discovers that the arch is broken, and steps back, miraculously, saved from a descent into the abyss beneath. In this case the bridge was marriage, the abyss, poverty. Hartley had taken it for granted that Mrs. Garner was a widow with a splendid jointure, and the illogical and absurd mistake would have moved him to laughter had not the tragical side of his disappointment been at present uppermost in his mind. Personal emotions, heartbreak, he was not conscious of. An hour ago, when he had kissed her hand, he had believed himself to be head and ears in love with Kathy, with her charming blushes, her reckless audacities, her invincible timidities. At this moment, what she represented to his mind was a vexatious miscalculation and loss of time; the thought of her was hardly more than one of his long list of financial disasters, and, just as after losing heavily in some speculation he had built hopes upon, he would experience for months afterwards a pang of selfdisgust at the sight of the name of the enterprise, so at this moment he hated the idea of this futile romance.

Evidently he had not been in love. "I suppose," he exclaimed audibly, as he hurried on, "I am incapable of being in love." And this conviction brought with it palpable relief, since in the midst of so much futility and failure his mistake was not a supreme mistake. It was just another of the same kind that had always been happening. He could at times pose, even to himself, as a cleverer man, a more successful man, than he actually was, and it was his habit to reflect as little as possible upon the actual details of his experience. At this moment, however, each separate event of his career seemed to thrust itself forward, - each one of a series of just such unhappy guesses as this had proved; a sequence of false auguries, unsuccessful issues, faulty tinkerings, abortive experiments; each pushing one another out of sight, substituting a fresh scheme for the one just doomed; each destined to shift through the same phases of hope, test and failure, and share the same disastrous fate. And at this moment he distinctly realized that in all these unhappy enterprises there had been, invariably, the same spur, - the wish somehow to get hold of money without giving money's worth.

It is always the supreme test of a man's philosophy whether he has the magnanimity to take up with what he can get, instead of pauperizing his life by aiming after the unattainable. The recollection suddenly flashed across Hartley's mind that his partner, Joseph Roylance, had yesterday told him

of his brother's having a new elient, a very rich woman, a stranger in New York, to whom it might be worth a young fellow's while to pay some little attention. The suggestion was timely, and piqued him into a wish to go on living. Life, after all, might prove to be a manageable affair. He began to see something beyond the blank wall against which he had been dashing aimlessly, and resumed gradually his usual buoyant sense of being a man of the world and master of his fate. Between his state of mind two hours before, when he had looked forward to engaging himself to Kathleen Garner, and his present detached condition, there was a gap to shudder over. But he had managed, - not, it is true, very gracefully, - to jump it, and was now on the safe side. A new life stretched out before him with new eravings and new resolutions, and its first necessity was that he should dine. felt that he had been ill-treated, — had passed through a hard ordeal and deserved compensation. Thus he determined not only to dine but to dine well. As Richard said: -

> "Since I am crept in favour with myself, I will maintain it with some little cost."

#### CHAPTER II.

#### HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY.

As Hartley entered his favorite café he found himself following a man whose figure and turn of the head struck him as familiar.

"Is that you, Garthe?" he said, leaning forward and putting his hand on the shoulder of the other, who had paused and stood looking about at the tables full of guests, the waiters in immaculate array, with napkins over their arms and order-cards in hand, hurrying hither and thither; at the lights, the glitter of glass, silver and china, against a background of palms, rubber plants and chrysanthemums. It was Lawrence Garthe, and he turned and shook hands with Hartley, who was his cousin in some remote degree.

"Have you dined?" he inquired, and at Hartley's shake of the head exclaimed with an air of relief, "Dine with me; I was horribly bored at the idea of sitting down alone."

Hartley, who had been bowing right and left to acquaintances who nodded to him from the groups on every hand, accepted the invitation, held up his hand with a gesture which brought the head waiter almost on the run, and in another moment they were established at a table in a quiet corner, from which a party had just risen. The luxury and splendor of the place, the easy effectiveness of his own good management in securing attention on the instant, reinstated him in his own esteem and put him in good humor. He was glad to have Lawrence Garthe, for once, see him in his own element: the object of general consideration, the recipient of glances, smiles, nods and waves of the hand from these rich and fashionable people.

"You are evidently at home here, Ferdinand," said Garthe. "Just order what you like, will you not? I so rarely dine out I prefer to dine well, but I hate thinking about it. I give you carte blanche."

Hartley's face glowed with satisfaction. He not only enjoyed a good dinner, but he enjoyed the ordering of it, particularly when another man was to pay the bill. Perhaps we seem to put Hartley in an ugly light, but his present sordidness was the result of circumstances, and actually he was no more mercenary than the generality of people. He possessed plenty of noble instincts, but they were blunted by a most unhappy practice of being hampered by debts. Five years before, he had put what small capital he possessed into a brokerage business, in which ever since he had been kept like a young hound in a leash by his partner, Joseph Roylance, who, warily watching the signs of the times, imposed his strong will upon his junior, deter-

mined to risk and lose nothing until they had lived through the present dangerous financial epoch. Hartley was always lamenting that he had arrived upon the stage of affairs just too late. During the decade of the Civil War, nothing could be easier than for any and every man to make a fortune. Now-a-days great fortunes were made, but not by any and every man. It was mere nonsense for Roylance to talk of incessant industry, watchfulness and perseverance; such old-fashioned methods of getting rich were useless lumber. Now-a-days money was not laid up by painstaking accumulation, but was won by some grand coup, by establishing a monopoly, by rigging and cornering the markets, by audacity, tactics and brutal force. It was hard for a man with the true conjuring word for conquering the world to be compelled to wait in the tadpole stage of existence until he was thirty. By strange accidents Hartley had been repressed and thwarted in every effort towards development. was liked by every one: by men, for his easy habit of accepting whatever came in his way without imposing his own standards upon others; by women, for his good looks and his gift of being to each what she wished him to be. Twice he had offered marriage to rich girls and had been refused. In one case the object of his pursuit was already promised; the other, who was plain but clever, derided him, told him that he was not in love,—that he was not even a good pretender; that if a man had nothing to offer

a woman in the way of money and position he ought, at least, to seem to have a heart. The fact was, Hartley's wish to be rich overmastered all other passions in his nature. He had no vices, and shrugged his shoulders at those of other men, declaring that they did not pay. His determination to get out of existence what he eraved had developed in him an eager head and a cool heart. His whole habit of life, his anxious problems, his crying necessities, - as we have seen, his very love affairs, - hinged on his imperative desire for riches. Yet although he experienced the ignominy of often being without the ready money in his pocket to answer just demands, he was yet quite ready to look down on Lawrence Garthe for having plenty of money in his pocket which he seemed to have no idea of spending in a way to get comfort out of existence.

The two kinsmen were of the same age, had been occasional playfellows as boys, and students at Yale at the same time, Hartley in the academic and Garthe in the scientific department. It was at college that Hartley had found out the comfort of having a cousin whose quiet habits permitted him to keep a full purse. Garthe was absorbed in his pursuits; born as he had been with a love of getting at the truth of things, he cared nothing for cheap and facile college dissipations. What he liked and courted was stress of persistence in hard work, intellectual stimulus, the

joyous fever of invention and discovery, travel, pursuit, adventure. As soon as he had graduated he was offered a lucrative post in Colorado as assayist and mining chemist. Shortly afterwards came the announcement of his marriage, and then Hartley had heard no more of him for five years, when he was told that Garthe had settled down in Berlin, after two years' prospecting in the Ural. mountains; that he had lost his wife, who had left a little son to whom he was devoted. Finally, six months before the opening of our story, Garthe and Hartley had encountered in New York, where Garthe was staying for a time, uncertain of his plans. He was bringing out a book, and was ready to accept any position which offered. He now told Hartley he was filling a place temporarily as lecturer in mineralogy and demonstrator in laboratory work in two institutions near the city.

In a way, the two men had absolutely nothing in common, but their long habit of intimacy had given them a basis of affection, and to-night, when by chance each was experiencing some particular need of feeling himself in touch with another human being, they were inclined to be more than usually cordial and expansive. Garthe's whole manner, nevertheless, suggested a deep-seated reserve not easily penetrated. In appearance he was not, like Hartley, a man whose striking good looks instantly took the eye. He was, however,

of fair height, with a lithe figure, and his face was at once powerful and refined. His forehead and temples seemed full of concentrated energy and purpose; his eyes were dark and peculiarly expressive; his mouth straight, well cut, was curve suggesting plenty of will; his smile instant and dazzling, although he did not waste it on every occasion. Everything about him, in fact, indicated equipoise, a reserve of force which he was not ready to expend upon the first object that offered.

Hartley, as we have said, instantly in high spirits, entered into the spirit of the occasion and wrote out an elaborate menu, which he flourished before his cousin's face as a challenge.

"I'll stand the expense for once," said Garthe.
"I ought to be willing to pay handsomely for a companion. Until I saw you I experienced a freezing sense of isolation."

"Think of it! It is pitiful, near a whole city full!"

"The whole city full was nothing to me. I could think of nothing but a certain street, a certain house, a certain room, and a certain little chap who was eating his own heart in longing for me as I for him. He was a naughty little chap this morning, and to punish him I told him I should not go home to dinner to-night."

"You punished yourself most, no doubt."

"One always does. It has lain like lead on

my heart all day that he would be fretting over it."

Hartley laughed, but not without sympathy.

"I, dare say I may have a talent for the domestic te observed, "only I have had no chance to de sitop it."

"How do you manage? Do you live alone?"

"Oh yes. Edna is married, has four children, and is wrapped up in her husband. I have nobody else belonging to me. I sleep and take my breakfast at — East Twentieth Street. At a quarter to nine I go down town and I lunch there. Four times out of the week, for six months in the year, I dine out, — and for at least three months I have a bewildering choice of invitations, and sometimes might eat half a dozen dinners a night. I have been best man at a wedding to-day, and was asked to stay afterwards for a 'high tea' and later to go to the opera with all the family party; but I declined, out of a foolish freak which has ended in a fiasco. In fact, Lawrence, until I met you I was in the very devil of a humor."

"It takes a little time to find out that the universe was not created solely to answer one's needs. I myself have been in a rage at the blunders on the part of Providence."

"I did n't shirk the responsibility," said Hartley.
"I have been walking the streets, calling myself ninny, blockhead, a light-headed superficial idiot who mistakes all that glitters for gold. However,

I have been in despair before and have got over it, and I dare say by the time we finish dinner I shall have begun to feel that my blunder was reasonable and that I am not altogether the fool I seem."

Garthe listened as if weighing the worth of the

confession.

"There are blunders and blunders," he observed.

"The important thing is not to make the irreparable blunder."

"A man does n't do that until he makes a foolish marriage," said Hartley. He was seasoning his oysters with great nicety, and did not observe that Garthe's lips were suddenly compressed and that a little frown appeared between his eyebrows.

"In this particular instance," Hartley went on with a half laugh, "I enjoy the unique consolation that, having been warned in time, I was able to sneak out of a false position. When I get over the unpleasant sensation of being a whipped cur I shall be glad it all happened as it did."

Garthe, perhaps not wholly liking the sound of this confession, gave his cousin a penetrating glance, as if wondering what lay behind the barriers of that attractive personality.

"Oh, well," he said after a moment's silence, "a man knows himself and his own mistakes, but

he ean't know another man's."

Having said so much Hartley changed his tack, and, throwing regrets to the winds, aimed at nothing but making himself an agreeable companion, Recovering his usual easy confidence in his own powers, he tried to make Garthe conceive something of the vivid and varied existence he had led; he epitomized his social experience, described notable people, gave a hint of certain phases of inside politics. Garthe listened, asking now and then with a certain deliberateness an incisive question which showed that his attention was held. He was at any rate glad that his companion's depression and misgiving had passed into exhilaration; that he had eaten his dinner with a good appetite, which seemed to show a healthy reaction from his bitter mood. When they rose from table it was after nine. If it were too late for a play, Hartley suggested, something interesting might be found at the variety theatres. Garthe said, No, he must go home.

"Come with me and see how I am settled," he added, and Hartley accepted.

The house was situated in a quiet street far up town, and stood almost in the centre of a long block of yellow brick dwellings faced with Portland stone, each exactly like its neighbor. Hartley observed that even Garthe was obliged to take his bearings and to glance at the number before he could be certain which was his own domicile; and, piquing himself, as he did invariably, on possessing every attribute, good taste included, in a higher degree than his fellow-men, he said mentally that when he chose a house he should insist on its having

a physiognomy of its own. Once across the threshold, however, any sense of stupid conformity vanished, and he looked about with satisfaction. A rich carpet of a dull red color covered the floor of all the rooms; the long, rather narrow parlor into which Garthe ushered him was lined with low cabinets and book-eases, their tops crowded with a jumble of china, Oriental brasses, and Greek figurines; while above on the red walls were hung pictures, chiefly etchings of old cities and famous buildings, and of landscapes after the paintings of Daubigny, Dupré, and Rousseau. Half way down the room was a huge writing-table, and everywhere, on desks, chairs, sofas, even on the rug, were piles of books. Before the fire, beside a comfortable chair, stood a small table with a shaded lamp for reading.

Garthe had said, on entering, "Look about you for a minute, Ferdinand, while I run up and see after the boy." He had let himself in with his latch-key, and the house seemed empty.

"Certainly, he has made himself comfortable," Hartley observed to himself as he looked about him. "He has made himself very comfortable."

He experienced anew a swelling of desire after his own share of the good things of the world. It seemed to him almost tragic that his individual possessions were so inadequate to his wishes. He did not feel covetousness or envy of what was another man's,—indeed, Garthe's prosperity was of too modest a description, too little aggressive, to stir jealousy. Rather what Hartley experienced was a desire to have a chance to get hold of himself, - to be himself; to express the tastes, cravings, affections, which were his very own. It was clear to him that Garthe had not bought those things and strewn them over the room to furnish it, but because each article was part of the equipment of his daily life; the books were for reading and study; the curios to illustrate something he had seen and done; the specimens of ore in the cabinets what he had discovered and tested; the desk was the place where he wrote; the chairs were to give him rest and ease; the fire was to warm him, and the lamp to light him. All was Garthe's. It was his own little world. Hartley felt like an outcast in comparison. "By Jove, it is enough to make one turn socialist," he said to himself.

At this moment a voice called.

"I say, Ferdy, do you mind stepping up here?"
Hartley bounded up the stairs. "Are you good
for another flight?" Garthe inquired, meeting him
on the landing. "Larry sleeps on the third floor
that Amelia may be near him." They ascended
together. "I told you," Garthe went on with a half
laugh, "that I was hard on my little chap this
morning. He was disobedient, and I don't like him
to be disobedient; and although it was a small matter, he lied to me. He owned up. I could n't have
the heart to whip him, but I told him I could not
come home and dine with such a bad boy. Amelia

says he was restless and unhappy all day, watched for me and made himself sick with crying when I did not come." He led the way into the front bedroom, where the light was turned low and shaded. In the centre of the room was a little brass bed with a canopy, and there lay the boy asleep, with a white Angora cat curled up on one side and on the other a Skye terrier, who winked a sleepy eye and wagged his tail. Ranged round the bed, the pillows, the tables, and chairs, were troops of tin soldiers, mechanical toys, a cow with a bell, a wooden horse with three legs, and a small music box.

"He gathered all his possessions to comfort him," said Garthe. "Poor little Larry, I was hard on him."

Hartley leaned over the sleeper, a fine well-grown child with curly brown hair, a flushed handsome face, full at the forehead and temples and narrowing below.

"See the dried tears on his cheek," said Garthe. He stooped and kissed these evidences of tears, sighing as he did so.

"He is a beautiful little fellow," Hartley said warmly.

"Well-made, well-knit. Look at his arm! just feel his calves!" and Garthe uncovered the body and held up a sturdy little leg. "He is never tired, never out of spirits, — at least when he can be near me." Garthe sighed again. "His high spirits show me the need of making him surrender his will."

- "Does he look like his mother?"
- "Not in the least. He is like me."
- "I confess I don't see the resemblance. Have you her portrait?"
- "No," said Garthe in a tone which warned Hartley he might be stirring painful sensibilities. Curious, nevertheless, to elicit something about the child's mother, he went on.
- "I knew she died early. I never happened to hear just how long your married life lasted."
  - "Just over three years," said Garthe.
- "You lost her before you pulled up stakes and went to Europe?"
- "Yes, Larry was a mere baby of fifteen months or so."
- "Pretty rough on the poor little motherless fellow, to say nothing of what it must have been to you."

Garthe stooped and put his cheek against the boy's.

"I wish he would wake up," he said. "I hate to think he may dream I have n't come back."

He lifted the light form out of the bed and pressed it passionately against his breast. The closed senses of the little sleeper unlocked sufficiently to make him respond to the caress; an expression, roguish, keen, and sweet, came into his face; his eyes half unclosed; he murmured a few inaudible words. Still he did not wholly wake. Garthe laid him back on the pillow, covered him up

earefully, called the Skye and the Angora, and led the way downstairs.

"This is his playroom," he remarked as they stopped after descending the first flight. "Here is my bedroom, just behind."

Everywhere there were signs of order and pleasantness: an air of readiness for the master.

"I like your house," said Hartley. "It seems made to live in."

"Yes, just big enough for me. The street is quiet, and outside I am so exactly like everybody else nobody would suspect me of having an identity of my own." They had now reached the first floor. "This is the dining-room, and in the yard I have built a small laboratory. Larry and I are as comfortable as two peas in a pod."

"They say a man has no right to be comfortable without a wife to look after him."

"A woman has no idea of home comfort," Garthe observed with cool disdain. "A house to her is a prison. She is always pining to be outside of it."

Hartley stared. "Are n't you a little hard on the gentler sex?" he exclaimed.

Garthe did not illustrate his statement or enlarge on it.

"I have an Englishman, by the name of Button, and his wife, to look after the house and take care of the boy," he went on. "Button has some janitor work outside and does a few odd jobs, but is on hand most of the time. He and Amelia lost a boy,

and perhaps that helps to make them fond of Larry. Besides, they are well off here. Amelia is a reasonably good cook, and has the sense to keep out of the way when I don't want her and within reach when I do."

"You are lucky."

"It is a place to hide in," said Garthe. "I hate a crowd."

"I envy you with all my heart. But I could n't live so. I must see people. I must be where something is going on. Settled down as you are here, I should dwindle into nothing. Not but that I get tired to death of club life, of going out, talking about things I don't care a button for, and listening to people I don't believe in. Still it passes the time. When a man cannot afford to marry he must take what he can get."

"When he does marry he takes what he can get," Garthe observed in a peculiar tone. The Angora cat was purring on a cushion, sheathing and unsheathing her claws, and blinking at the fire. The Skye had curled himself up in a ball close beside her.

"Well, my dear fellow," Hartley exclaimed, laughing as he spoke, "as you have been married and I have not been married you understand the subject and I do not understand the subject. But you ought not to rob an innocent young fellow of his illusions. I am a marrying man. If I had your income and a house like this, I should want a

pretty woman opposite me here, — or closer, just beside me, — with her book or workbasket on the low table, a slim foot held up to the fire, and a hand within reach of mine. You ought to marry again. I tell you, Lawrence, you ought to do it on account of the boy. He must be lonely."

"Yes, he's lonely when I am away."

"Do you know many agreeable people in New York?"

"Few or none. I have no wish to go into society."

"Edna might do something for you. I could introduce you to —"

"I thank you, — I am very well off as I am. I am thrown occasionally with men of my own interests and pursuits."

"You do not care to meet women?"

" No."

Hartley was somewhat piqued. "I dare say you are wise to say 'Enough is enough,' — not to run after the too much. Your house is comfortable and offers all you yourself require. If you had a wife she might make it a grievance that it is not in a fashionable neighborhood; that it is too far from the shops and the theatres. Either she would be obliged to go out constantly or she would complain of the long, lonely days."

Garthe uttered a short, harsh laugh. "So that is the elysium you propose for me," he said, "Certainly you do not seem to have much more

rose-pink optimism about the sex than I have. Don't say I converted you to my opinion that they are all hungering and thirsting after sensation,—never so much at home as when they are abroad. If a man craves domestic comfort, let him look at the crowds of women in the street whose only object is to kill time!"

"Oh, come!" said Hartley. "You are prejudiced, one-sided. There are plenty of domestic women."

"You cannot take up a magazine, even a daily paper, without having 'Woman's Work,' 'Woman's Progress,' 'Woman's Mission,' staring you in the face. And what it means is that the whole sex is rebellious, revolutionary, dissatisfied, each craving a personal career. They have got the idea into their heads that they are sphinxes, and are bent on elucidating their own riddle."

His tone, his glance, the lines about his mouth, all showed that he was in earnest. It might have seemed as if he were under the goad of some tyrannous reality, clear to his own perceptions.

- "However," he proceeded, with a gesture as of concession, "if your experience of women is more fortunate than mine, I congratulate you."
- "When a man hates women," said Hartley, "it is because he has loved one of them too much. I have kept on the safe side."
- "You're sensible. But when you told me to-night that something had gone wrong with you, I at once laid it to a woman."

Hartley had grown suddenly serious.

- "But I was not in love," he said thoughtfully. Then in a different manner he burst out, "Hang it, I have not the peace of mind, the leisure, to fall in love. I'm too restless, too much at the mercy of events. When I get up in the morning I have other things to think about. You know how I stand financially,—just where I was six months ago when I borrowed five hundred dollars of you. Roylance ties me hand and foot; he is afraid of his own shadow. If it were not for a little outside business of my own I should not know where to look for ready money, and lately every venture has been unlucky."
  - "Things have gone wrong to-day?"
- "You were right about there being a woman in the case. I have been running after a widow for more than a year, supposing her to be rich; now it turns out that she has little or nothing."
- "Did you find it out before you had made an offer?"
- "I am going to tell you exactly what happened. I want to see how it strikes a contemporary. Did you ever hear of Bernard Garner, the lawyer, who died four years ago? He left a young wife, and a daughter not far from her age. They spend their summers at the Goddards' on the Hudson, next to Edna's country house, and we were first thrown together there. Here in town I have visited them constantly. The widow was charming, the step-

daughter was charming. It was a case of 'How happy could I be with either!' It was all so easy, so natural. I seemed to have stepped into a place ready made for me. They lived handsomely,—there was every reason in the world for supposing they were rich as Crœsus. Well, to-night—"He broke off suddenly.

"Well, what happened to-night? Did you offer yourself to the wrong one?"

"I had no chance to offer myself to anybody," said Hartley, and without the faintest reserve recounted his experience.

"There sat the girl, calm, proud, sincere, turning to me with her splendid eyes and throwing down the fact like a challenge that they were poor."

Garthe, with an intent, rather puzzled look, had followed the confession, evidently trying to understand the logic of the situation.

"Do you mean that she wished you to come to the point?"

"On the contrary, I suspect that she had heard I could only afford to marry a rich woman, and so considered it honest and just to put the true state of the case before me."

"What did you say to her?"

"Nothing to the point. Fancy, if you can, the insufferable position of a man who, when he hears that the woman he has been making love to has not money enough to support him, simply grins like a baboon and withdraws."

"I ean't fancy it," said Garthe. "I advise you to go back to-morrow and offer yourself like a man."

Hartley, however, had relegated the incident to a past stage in his experience, and now looked back upon it, if not with complacency, at least with composure.

"No," he said, "there is no step backward. They do not want me. The widow must marry money, just the same as I must marry money. fancy Constance is glad to get me out of the way. She is passionately devoted to her step-mother."

"You are sure it was not a mere test of your disinterestedness?"

"Quite sure," said Hartley. "I was in the wrong all the time. To begin with, it was the girl I was actually a little in love with. I can't exactly explain it, but my instinct sounded her through, and I did not think she cared about me; while the other - However, I will not be such a coxcomb as to say that anybody ever cared a button about me. The odd circumstance is that the girl is, compared with the step-mother, very well off. I'm always making mistakes."

"I tell you," said Garthe, "you will never get over the torment of this until you put yourself right, no matter what happens afterwards. Go back to-morrow aud offer yourself."

"I would to the girl, willingly."

"Because she has some money?" Garthe demanded indignantly.

"No; because if it is possible for me to fall in love with any woman she is that woman. Don't be too hard on me, Lawrence," Hartley went on with a groan. "My fate is not too easy. It cuts me off from generous impulses."

Garthe was sensible of so much confusion in his ideas concerning essential points in the story that he did not venture to make up his mind against his cousin, who invariably posed as something better or worse than he actually was. By this time it was midnight, and Hartley—although declaring that he shuddered at the idea of going to his lonely room to find his groveling self for sole companion—rose to go. Garthe detained him a few moments, put a few questions, then sent him away happier and richer.

## CHAPTER III.

## WHEN HALF-GODS GO.

When Bernard Garner brought home his second wife, - the only child of his old friend Allington Pierpont of Virginia,-Constance was a girl of thirteen, and her mother had been dead ten years. Her two sisters were already married, her brothers were at college, and henceforward this sweet, bright young step-mother made the first interest in her life, drew from her, ardor, devotion, loyalty, -a longing for self-sacrifice, a feeling that she must not only love but guard. For Constance divined by instinct, although she had never quite formulated her idea, that Kathleen's strong point Kathy herself was not logic or discrimination. confessed it. "But then," she would explain, "I was not braced up by discipline; I was not really educated. We could not afford it, and papa always said that a born lady was endowed by Heaven with whatever she ought to know, and that he considered it a risk to interfere with the intentions of a wise Providence. Then Mr. Garner always told me he was glad I was not learned, that it was enough for a woman to know how to spell, and that two and two make four. I confess I never could

understand clearly that two and two do make four, but, you see, I was brought up on fairy stories and the Arabian Nights, and have always expected odd, delightful, and surprising things to happen."

It had been one of these unexpected events when she was snatched from her decaying Virginian home to preside over Bernard Garner's house in New York. Mr. Garner was fond of his young wife, but he was an active man, engrossed in business and politics, and was obliged to content himself with giving her all the money she could spend, and leaving her and Constance to take care of each He lived but a few years after this marriage, dying with awful suddenness, of heart failure, the effect of exhaustion and bad air, at the end of an arduous and exciting case in court. He had been wholly free from organic disease, and his death was apparently a mere accident. Like a thief in the night it had come and had robbed Kathleen and Constance, not only of husband and father, but of the ease and prosperity his continued life would have insured them. Then a bank which held a large balance belonging to him was ruined in consequence of heavy defalcations, and other losses followed; for troubles, as everybody knows, come "not as single spies, but in battalions."

"What will Kathy do?" was the one thought of Constance in season and out of season.

"She must marry again. That is her métier," the brothers and sisters had said. And although

the idea of death did not soon efface itself in the house, where everything seemed still to watch and wait for the absent master, Constance had no recourse save to hold to this solution of the problem, although for her to have framed it in words to Kathleen would have been a treason, a profanation. It was simply that, weighing her individuality against Kathy's, she found it essential to herself that Kathy should be happy, have wide horizons, a chance for enthusiasm, power to make her life beautiful. Constance had not, so far, thought in the least about her own personal cravings, but her imagination was full of fancies about Kathy's future, Kathy's happiness. She was still so young that she had not fitted her abstract ideas to the concrete. Kathy was to marry again because she needed, for all the coming years, affections to fix her heart, simple duties to which to bind herself. Gay and sad by turns, delighting in change, in new ideas, launching into crude ambitions, she was to Constance the most charming, the most feminine, the most dangerous of all women, the one most requiring a support and guide. A happy second marriage now, which should bring her a good husband and children, - that was the destiny Constance desired to appoint for her. The girl's youthful enthusiasm, always ready to interpret the world and its events nobly, was shown in the way in which she had for a time idealized Ferdinand Hartley. must be the man she had dreamed of for Kathy,

because he came at the moment he was needed, like the prince in fairy tales. He was handsome, sat well, walked well, talked fairly, and could amuse women with an air of wonderful elegance. It was not strange that he started in the mind of Constance a train of subtle sentiment and that she invested him - in his character of Kathy's suitor with romantic glamour. And, indeed, up to a certain point, he played his part to perfection. The stage seemed to be his; the circle of the Garners during their period of deep mourning was a small one. was made up of the Challoners, of John Marchmont, the artist, a friend and contemporary of Bernard Garner, who had always come and gone in the house with the most perfect intimacy, of Constance's sisters, Mrs. Goddard and Mrs. Tracy, and their families, and of her brothers. Naturally, with Ferdinand Hartley as the one outsider, his attentions did not pass without comment; and when it was made clear that Mrs. Garner was the object of his pursuit, each of the lookers-on, except Mrs. Challoner and John Marchmont, was willing to accept him for what he seemed to be, - a young man of good looks and good family, a fairly desirable parti, who was entitled to everybody's gratitude for taking Kathy off their hands. It was Mrs. Challoner, invariably keen-eyed, who detected something unstable, flickering and inconsistent in Hartley; and it was John Marchmont who, the moment he found an ally in her, went a step further and

suggested to Steven Goddard that they were too ready to give away Bernard Garner's widow; that she was very young, very ignorant of the world, and that she ought not to be permitted a chance to become attached to a man unless his eligibility had been subjected to a rigid scrutiny.

Thus it had been John Marchmont who was actually behind events and had set the forces in play whose operations we have seen. Awakened to a sense of his responsibilities, Steven Goddard finally bestirred himself, and it had been at the very wedding when Hartley had figured as best man, that he suddenly startled his sister-in-law by saying, "I don't like that fellow's going to your house so much. They say he is heavily in debt, — that he wants a rich wife. Can it be that he supposes Mrs. Garner has money?"

"Mr. Hartley in debt!" repeated Constance in dismay. "Wanting a rich wife! How could he possibly believe that Kathy has money?"

"I have it from men who know him, that he has always laughed at the idea of marriage unless he could come into at least ten thousand a year by it."

"Is he so mercenary?" Constance murmured, feeling as if all she believed in was melting from beneath her feet.

"He is hard up,—he is no more mercenary than anybody else. It is the way of the world. I think he ought to be informed just how Mrs. Garner

stands; but I don't know exactly who is to tell him."

Constance knew, for her own conscience was on edge. She could not have slept without gathering all her forces into one effort to make everything clear to the man who had been perhaps deceived by the clever little expedients she had felt it graceful and becoming to use in order to hide the fact that they were not so rich as they appeared to be. Honor, justice, common kindness, dictated her course. She hardly gave herself time to make a mental prediction as to how Hartley would bear the test of this sharp and importunate reality. The demand of her heart and soul was to tell the truth. For the moment she cared for nothing else. Then, when he had crept away that night after hearing her confession, tears filled her eyes and brimmed over. She had detected in the man she had idealized, not only keen disappointment, but an utter absence of any real feeling. The cohesive force of her impressions about him seemed suspended as by a touch of magic; only a sense of her mistake remained, - a bewildering experience. She herself might rejoice to feel that she had tested Hartley all round, and might be free of all illusions concerning him forevermore. But how about Kathy, in whom, all these months, she had been trying to rouse aspirations and sensibilities which must now make her very unhappy? How should she face Kathy? To have touched upon the subject in cold blood, voluntarily to have told her step-mother that Hartley had been weighed in the balance and found wanting, was impossible. She heard a rustle on the stairs, a step in the hall, and shook off her tears disdainfully.

Kathy glided in, looked round the room, and exclaimed:—

"Oh, Mr. Hartley has gone?"

"Yes," said Constance, "I did not try to keep him; I told him there was no dinner. Naturally, like other men bent on dining, he went away."

"Greedy creature," murmured Kathy. "But I am glad. Look at me, Constance! Tell me I am lovely, enchanting, for I know I am."

"That gown is certainly very artistic."

"And becoming; no cold perfection for me! It is a delightful gown. Don't you know some gowns, when you first put them on, do not seem quite one's own? One realizes that one may finally get used to them, but for the moment one is constrained, ill at ease! But this makes me feel light as air, sure of myself, bold. I can do anything in it,—stand, sit, waltz— Look at me all round. Whichever way one looks at it, that seems to be the very best point of view."

"You are delicious. But it is time for you to go."

They embraced as if for a year's separation.

"Do you know, Constance," faltered Kathy, clinging close, "beginning to dress and go out

again makes me feel that I cannot get over missing your father. It does not seem quite worth while to put on new gowns unless he can look at me."

Kathy returned triumphant from the dinner party, with so many fresh impressions that she did not at first, when days passed without Hartley's coming to the house, seem to miss him. But after a week had gone by she said to Constance:—

"Do you suppose Mr. Hartley could possibly have been vexed with me for going away that evening?"

"Oh, no."

"He told me he did not approve of my going. He put it to my conscience whether I ought to go."

"Mr. Hartley likes to make a striking impression. He does not particularly care what it is. Romeo describes the manner of man he is when he says of Mercutio, 'He will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month.'"

"Ye-es," said Kathy, thinking of that kiss upon her hand at the foot of the staircase. She would have liked to ask Constance if it were a fault or an absurdity or an impertinence in Hartley. If the first or last she did not wish to expose him to censure, and if the second to derision. She gradually began to look upon all he had said and done that night as a mistake of which he had probably repented. Kathy herself made so many mistakes, committed so many follies, she could be tender over the weaknesses of others. She decided not to speak of it, to forget all about it, and succeeded so well that when some two weeks later she met Hartley the recollection of his indiscretion had slipped from her mind.

This was on the occasion of a theatre party made up by Mrs. Challoner. She had invited eight people, but found herself flung over by two of the men at the last moment, and accordingly looked round the house, hoping to see some acquaintances who might fill up her box sociably.

"Who is that with Ferdinand Hartley?" she inquired.

But Kathy, whom she addressed, had no idea who the dark, slender man standing beside Hartley in the aisle, waiting for the usher to find their seats, might be. "Presentable, don't you think so?" pursued Mrs. Challoner. "And whatever Ferdy Hartley's faults are, he never means to make the mistake of running after people he can make nothing out of. Let's have them both."

Thus it was by chance rather than by intention on any one's part that Lawrence Garthe was to meet the Garners. He and Hartley had seen each other frequently of late and had come to the theatre together on the second night of a new play which had captured the public. When the usher brought Mrs. Challoner's card scribbled over with an invitation to them both to join her party, Garthe was ready to decline on the instant. It

was opposite to his habit and repellant to his inclination to accept, but Hartley clutched his arm.

- "I must go, —I can't decline under their eyes."
  - "Go, then; go, by all means."
- "I can't face them alone. They are both there. I caught a glimpse of them just as I sat down and have not been able to raise my eyes. You must go with me."
  - "Nonsense. I can do nothing for you."
- "But you can," said Hartley; and his embarrassment was so clear that Garthe out of pity was constrained to acquiesce and to follow his companion to Mrs. Challoner's box.

Some secret operation of his mind, hidden almost to himself, enlightened him at the instant he entered as to the identity of the girl whose eyes met his with a clear unfaltering look. That was Constance, he said to himself, and the pretty, radiant creature was the widow. Outwardly he was the quietest of men, but it suddenly struck him sharply that he was a fool to have wandered out of the path he had appointed to himself. Not that he magnified the possible significance of the event or had any ominous vision of possible results to follow it. But the sense of pleasure with which he encountered the four women, Mrs. Challoner, her niece, and the Garners, startled him with its undercurrent of strangeness, its almost

pathetic contrast to his usual mood. He said to himself again that he had joined the party of strangers only because he apprehended the delicacy of Hartley's position and felt for him.

Hartley, however, after a single moment of discomposure, glided with his usual ease through What he had dreaded had been some change of attitude on the part of Mrs. Garner and Constance. But after Mrs. Challoner, always smiling, good-natured, and slightly satirieal, had welcomed him, after he had bowed to Blanche, he had turned to Kathleen, who, with just her usual manner, told him that he had deserted them of late, but that they had been talking of sending him an invitation to dinner. Even Constance shook hands with him in a friendly way. Too much kindness may have the effect of eruelty, and Hartley, as he took his stand behind the group of women, did not loom up as a giant to his own perceptions. On how fine a needle's point a man's supremacy is balanced! How quickly the scale is turned! Instead of embarrassing him by criticism or curiosity, everybody was looking at Garthe, whom John Marchmont had known in Europe and had greeted warmly as an old acquaintance. Hartley knew very well that nothing pleased Mrs. Challoner so much as a new acquaintance whom she could conceive in an imaginative way and invest with all the charming qualities she had found lacking in the people she had tried and

tested. Hartley dwindled in his own eyes as he watched Garthe drop into the chair she indicated behind her, just at the right angle for Mrs. Garner to turn towards him, effectively showing that slight charming face with its ripple of smiles and blushes under the cloud of fair hair. He could see that Garthe, as he bent forward and addressed her, constantly smiled in return.

Garthe himself was conscious of finding beauty in Kathleen, the sort of beauty that comes and goes, that, absent, leaves a longing for it as for the smile of a child. To realize just what he felt, however, in this sudden and unexpected entrance into a different world, would be to realize a chill and empty atmosphere without real warmth and without light, in which heat and color begin to unite and burn, and to glorify the commonest things into beauty. He was first moved by a sense of welcome, then of charm. He sat bending forward, giving ear quite impartially to the two women as they confided to him and to each other their crisp and laughing criticism of the leading lady on the stage, whose chief effort seemed to be to show that she had emulated Bernhardt, at least in studying the effect of her own draperies. coiled about sinuously, sat in spirals, wheeled round full-face at the same time that her back was towards the audience, with her train spread out like a peacock's tail; and as she sat, reclined, rose, embraced, or fainted with emotion, was, from her lack of any spontaneity or naturalness, a comic display to these observers.

Garthe, amused, threw in a word now and then; but as he bent forward his eyes became gradually riveted, not on the face of Kathleen, but on Constance's pure, proud profile beyond. The girl sat with her attention fixed apparently on the stage, but twice she had looked at him with an indefinable glance which had arrested his attention and made him wonder what was behind it. wish she would turn her face this way again," he said to himself; and, as if compelled, she did so, and met his eyes, again with that large child-like gaze of wistful curiosity, almost a solemnity of expectation. There seemed to be no hindering self-consciousness in her mind, no sense of the effect of her own beauty, an utter absence both of assumption and demand so far as she herself was concerned; yet at the same time he recognized in her glance a sort of appeal.

"Who is your friend?" she inquired of Hartley at the end of the first act.

Glad of a subject, Hartley gave a rapid sketch of Garthe's career, although actually he was acquainted with but a narrow fringe of its incidents. What he could touch upon with enthusiasm was the character of his cousin, his intellect, his persistent, indomitable energy, the amount of hard work he had already accomplished.

"Rather a fascinating face," said Constance.

"I never considered Garthe handsome," said Hartley, with the surprise natural to a really handsome man when the good looks of another are praised.

"Certainly not handsome, perhaps rather ugly," Constance hastened to say, amply atoning to Hartley, who thought she implied that if she found Garthe acceptable it was by a triumph of mind over matter.

"See him laugh at what Mrs. Garner is saying," Hartley murmured. "I actually feel as if fate had brought them together."

Constance flushed proudly; but had she not herself seemed to make Kathy a merchantable thing waiting in the market for a trader? Having hazarded this suggestion, and waited for a moment to measure its effect, he went on:—

"When you spoke to me the other night, I was overwhelmed; I might have said something, but what right had I to speak? No, I had no right; I have been glad since that even at the risk of being misunderstood I did not utter a syllable. Sometimes when a man has been too presumptuous, all he can do is to go away — no matter where."

Constance looked at him, bewildered, but at the same time reassured by this frank and free allusion.

- "I simply wished to let you understand," she began, but he made a little gesture.
  - "Shall we forget it all?" he asked.
  - "With all my heart," she returned.
  - "It was like cutting my hand off, like tearing

my heart out," he said. "But it is done, and now that I am here again with you both I feel grateful to you. Don't be afraid of me,—I have weighed everything. I have surrendered,—I have the peace of mind which comes to a man when he accepts defeat; but there is Garthe who has succeeded in everything he has undertaken. He shines me down."

If the passionate pain of the lover did not ring in these words, they were less likely to make Constance feel remorse. It pleased her heart and head that Hartley was not as unworthy as she had feared. It was also a relief that Kathy, next day, seemed to have forgotten him, and spoke only of Lawrence Garthe.

Both men were coming to dinner that evening, and it was natural for Constance to tell all she had heard about the antecedents of the new acquaintance; how he had been married before he was twenty-three, had lost his wife, who had left an infant son; how he lived quietly up-town in a comfortable little house, and was engaged in bringing out a book. Constance could tell so much, although she and Garthe, while vividly conscious of each other, had not exchanged a word. It was Kathy who was able to describe him more exactly. She admired him, she declared: his speech was easy and deliberate; he was always himself, never abrogated his individuality, did not strive for effect; his glance though searching was sympathetic; his smile

was a delightful surprise. One tried to make it return.

Constance could only say to herself that when half-gods go the gods arrive. Kathy had never spoken of Hartley with so much enthusiasm. Never, never would she, Constance, endeavor again to stir an impulse in another; but, not to thwart what was a clear case of destiny, she agreed with Kathy that Garthe's face was interesting, clearly cut, thoughtful, yet capable of lighting up into decided charm. It was very decided — the face of a man who had suffered; not only who had suffered, but who was familiar with suffering, who had accepted suffering and the discipline it brought.

John Marchmont, habitually conscious of being too old, too grim, too gray about the temples to make an attempt to win Bernard Garner's widow, yet who had contrived rather neatly to get rid of Hartley as a possible rival, was rather startled, on coming to the house that evening, to find that a new star had risen in Kathy's firmament. But then to elderly people the world is always inconveniently crowded by the young, the aspiring, the revolutionary.

Garthe was, as a stranger, accorded the first place. He led Mrs. Garner out to dinner, and on his side observed with interest that John Marchmont escorted Mrs. Challoner and himself took the foot of the table with an air of being at home in the house. He was a tall man with gray hair and mustache, and brown eyes of singular brilliancy. Mrs. Challoner was a woman of fifty, dark, odd, piquant, rather ugly except for her bright glance and the dazzling gleam of her teeth when she smiled. She wore rose-color, with strings of pearls round her throat and wrists, and gave the requisite touch of color to the table, for Mrs. Garner was in black, diaphanous with jet, but still black, and Constance had on a white gown guiltless of a furbelow. Garthe was seated between his two hostesses. Hartley had brought Constance to the table; then, after seating her, had gone to his own place at Mrs. Garner's left.

Garthe again had experienced the same look from Constance of naïve interest and expectation which had perplexed him the night before. To-night, having thought about it all day, it seemed to answer some clear hope and expectation in his mind. He longed to talk to her, but knew not how to begin. It was Mrs. Challoner and John Marchmont who at once plunged into a lively controversy. They had met that day at a private sale of French oil paintings. She had asked him what was best worth buying, and had made a bid for a certain picture, only to find that he had been before her and had secured it for himself.

"I told you it was worth buying," he said by way of defense. "I did not tell you it was to be bought."

"But I coveted it the moment I set my eyes on it. I was excessively disappointed."

"I had to have it, don't you see, my dear Mrs. Challoner? It was decreed from the very beginning of things that Cazin was to paint that picture expressly for me. There it was, a long flat road edged with poplars trimmed almost to poles; a gathering storm, thickening dusk; a man toiling up the footpath with a load of faggots on his back. And I am only rich enough to buy a picture when I cannot possibly go on living without it, whereas you can buy them by the half-dozen, and at any time."

"I liked that Cazin because it was so restful," said Mrs. Challoner. "I could have put it on the easel in my morning-room and have sat and looked at it when I was tired and out of spirits."

"But then you never are tired or out of spirits. People never are until they are old, and you are young."

"If I am not old, who is old? I wonder if you pretend to be older than I am?"

"I am a thousand years older. The moment you are presented with a new idea you want it; while my feeling at all novelty is, 'Thank heaven, I've rounded that cape!'"

"The thing with me is, I can't afford to let myself seem old. What would Mr. Challoner think of it, particularly as we have no daughters?"

"Yes, there it is, — besides being young and happy you enjoy the supreme consolation of a husband. Now I have no wife, — never did have one."

"That is the reason you suppose a husband to be a supreme consolation. Just as if the very reason I longed so for that picture was because, having a husband, I never can enjoy any proper peace of mind."

"You and Challoner don't seem to wear each other out. You told me this afternoon you had not eaten a meal together for a week."

"That is just what does wear me out. If a woman could have her husband always under her eye, there might be some possible comfort. But I am compelled to lie in my bed and suffer each morning to think of Mr. Challoner eating his breakfast alone. Then at luncheon he is miles away down-town, who knows where? Then if I go out to dinner, — and I assure you I go out to dinner as often as anybody will ask me, — he has a standing engagement at his club. So you see! No, it is impossible to take it lightly, — so long as you are married, you are the victim of a dreadful sense of responsibility. If your actual husband is not there, the phantom of duty is."

Constance, laughing slightly, happened to glance at Garthe and saw his face change under her eyes. A little frown came between his brows,—each feature altered in expression. She said to herself that she and Kathy ought to have been talking to him instead of leaving him to be amused by this intimate encounter between Mr. Marchmont and Mrs. Challoner. But then the objection to a

small dinner is that every one is expected to talk equally, yet the conversation is apt to be monopolized by one or two; and to enjoy jokes, allusions, and repartees, one requires to be well acquainted with people, their idiosyncrasies, their likings and dislikings. Mr. Garthe could not possibly know what a devoted couple the Challoners were. But Garthe caught Constance's perplexed and wistful look, and smiled.

"I should like to see that Cazin," he observed, and it was the first time he had actually addressed her.

"I should like to see it too," she replied. "Mr. Marchmont lives out at Bowhill, and Kathy shall persuade him to give us a studio party, and you shall go with us. Kathy dear, tell Mr. Marchmont that we are longing, Mr. Garthe and I, to see his Cazin."

"I am always asking the most incredible things of Mr. Marchmont," said Kathy, looking up at Garthe with her prettiest blush and her abashed infantile glance, but directing her voice across the table, "and yet I am so dreadfully afraid of him."

The artist heard her and glanced back severely. "I know that preamble by heart," he observed. "How am I to be victimized now?"

"It was Mr. Garthe who put it into my head," she said, imploringly. "That is, he suggested to Constance—"

"I care very little what Mr. Garthe wants, or

even Constance. They are logical and reasonable people and do not expect, in this world at least, to get everything they have a fancy for," said Mr. Marchmont. "It is when you set your heart on anything that I tremble."

"Do you mean that I am not logical, that I am not reasonable?" said Kathy with an air of candid surprise.

"I mean that when you wish a thing to happen, it has to happen, — just as an earthquake, a cyclone, a tornado, rushes on in its course, careless of what stands in its way."

"Very well," said Kathy with a gesture of prerogative. "Since you say I have to have all I ask for, so be it. I want you to give us a studio party and show us the Cazin."

"Fix the day and hour. Tell me whom to invite and what you desire me to order to suit your appetite."

"Oh, just ourselves," said Kathy, extending a fair arm in each direction as if to embrace the tableful; "and give us afternoon tea with chocolate and buttered muffins, and three-cornered sandwiches full of all sorts of little relishes, and fancy cakes with icing. As for the day, Mrs. Challoner shall settle that. She has so many things to do."

"Nothing but what I will gladly throw over," said Mrs. Challoner, "although it does seem little short of effrontery to ask me to go twelve miles

out of town to see a picture I was shamefully robbed of. But it will be a relief for a few hours to do something I ought not to do. I am so worn out, — pulled in so many different directions. Everybody comes to me to ask me to be a manager, to be a patroness, to give my name, to give ten dollars, to open my drawing-room — "

"But why do you do it?" asked John Marchmont. "All you fashionable women put yourselves voluntarily into that treadmill existence, and then complain."

"I can't afford to be left out in the cold. You see I was born before these new ideas came in, and in order to keep up with them I am obliged to go everywhere, see, hear, touch, and handle everything. It is unspeakable what tasks the new generation set us! One year I actually attended a cooking-school and made pâtés and croquettes with my own hands."

"I wish I might have had the privilege of eating them," said Hartley, who, with a feeling of being left out in the cold, had consoled himself by devoting himself to his dinner.

"You might not have lived to express your gratitude for the favor. They were detestable. My cook, who thought it a shocking waste of good material, said, 'An' sure, it's strange how hard gentlefolks has to work to get hold of the knack that the likes of us are born with!' However, I had the experience. Then the next thing

I was told to do was to visit the slums. My money was not enough, — I must give myself, shed the light of my presence, have clubs, guilds, teach the orphan girl to read and the orphan boy to sew. It has been a liberal education to me. I have had to cram everything except the alphabet in order to keep up with the inquiring minds of the uneducated intellects I am supposed to instruct. Finally, this year I am in the 'Modern Women' movement. We are studying Ibsen. Yesterday I went to hear a lecture on his heroines, — Nora, Hedda Gabler, and Boletta."

"I don't read Ibsen myself," struck in Hartley, "but I know enough about him from those who do to venture the hope that we shall not hear of your running away from Mr. Challoner."

"I don't feel sure. The lecture was given by a Miss Eugenie Shepard, a Western woman," said Mrs. Challoner. "She told us that Ibsen was the first writer who had actually penetrated our prison house and discovered how we are beating our life out against the iron bars of custom, convention, and submission. The trouble is in the dualism of our natures, which has made us—in the eternal conflict between the wish to be ourselves and the wish to merge ourselves in another existence—suppress our own individuality. However, the longing of release has risen. Boletta said, 'What is it to us that the great world passes our doors? We cannot join in the stream. I don't see much

difference between our life and that of the fish in the pond there!""

"Poor things! What do you want! To be married? Some of you are married," said John Marchmont.

"Too many are married," retorted Mrs. Challoner, shaking her head. "Girls have married, not because they are in love, but because they are sick of their maiden existences. But neither Ibsen nor the lecture encouraged girls in that course, because as wives they are certain to have even a worse time and to be bored to death without hope of release. Now what all women to-day long for and are determined at any cost to attain is a chance to peep into the real world, the world which they have hitherto been forbidden to know anything about, — that is, man's world."

"I see now," said John Marchmont, "what is behind some people's determination to get into my studio by fair means or foul."

"It quite stirred me up," pursued Mrs. Challoner. "I realized that marriage had deprived me of my fair chance of development. I have always had to think of what Mr. Challoner liked, — all my individuality has been subordinated to the task of pleasing him. I have simply been his wife. Just think of it!"

"Just his wife! Miserable fate! No wonder you feel hindered, cramped, thwarted."

"I suddenly experienced new sensations, new

powers, and longed for new opportunities. But how could I find them, living as I do with Mr. Challoner, who bribes me with presents, spoils me, and makes me happy and contented. I felt quite in a rage with him! For Miss Shepard had expressly said that what kept woman from development was just this foolish acceptance of her fate, — that not happiness, not content, was her duty, but discontent with the conditions of her lot. She herself ought not only to be discontented but to make everybody else discontented. Oh, I did feel furious with Mr. Challoner!"

"Ibsen is laughing in his sleeve at the whole of you," said John Marchmont. "He says within himself, 'Shakespeare's heroines have been the standard of womankind long enough. Now let us have those who make not the charm, the joy, the sanctity, but the misery of mankind: the unlovely, the unlovable, the sexless."

"There were always the Regans and Gonerils," said Garthe; "always the furies and the fates."

Mrs. Challoner was conscious of the scorn in his tone.

"Ah, Mr. Garthe," she retorted, "one sees that you have the true masculine feeling. We are to develop only in the lines which please your taste, your love for peace and quiet. You would expect a woman to be just simply your wife."

"Just simply my wife!" repeated Garthe. "I am not so presumptuous. I expect nothing. Men

are at present mere lookers-on. What piques most of us into making the effort to go on living is the curiosity to see where you are to bring us."

"You will not admit that we have an equal right with you to work, influence, emoluments, ambi-

tion."

"But I never found out yet that I had a right to anything. I have had certain duties and have tried to fulfill them."

"That is what we women want, the right to a common share of the duties of life."

Mr. Marchmont was laughing. "I did not know," he said, "that we were invading your province."

"Our province! You have n't left us any. You have claimed everything desirable, and left us to

keep house and tend babies."

"You do not want to keep house and tend babies any longer?"

"No, we do not want to keep house and tend babies any longer."

"You want no more privileges, no more protection, no more domestic sanctity?"

"No, we do not want any more privileges."

"Yes, you do. You want all your privileges; you want all your privileges and men's, too," said Mr. Marchmont. "And you shall have them," he added soothingly. But Mrs. Challoner was listening to what Garthe was saying.

"I think you are right in feeling that pictures

ought not to be shut up in private houses. Still, I sympathize with collectors, for I admit that I am selfish enough to prefer to own anything which gives me enjoyment. Books, for example; when I recall a particular one, I like to think of my own copy, on a certain shelf, where I can go and put my hand on it, if need be, in the dark."

"And I dare say, Mr. Garthe, if you had a wife," Mrs. Challoner broke in, "you would want her always in a certain place, before the fire, or at a window."

"Why should a man wish to marry a woman at all," returned Garthe, "except that he finds it impossible to be content away from her?"

"Oh, I see, you would be a terrible husband," said Mrs. Challoner, laughing.

"You describe me exactly."

"I mean, as I said just now, that you would want a woman to be just simply your wife, nothing else."

"I certainly do not consider that a woman, any more than a man, can serve two masters, acknowledge a higher and a lower law."

"The higher law would be devotion to you."

Garthe looked at her and smiled, without other answer.

"Oh, I see," she exclaimed, "you would be a terrible despot."

He flushed. "I confess," he said, "that I consider a love of individual possession what gives

meaning to our lives. It is the test of our sincerity. If we covet any object and do not try with all our might and main first to gain it and then to keep it, it shows our half-heartedness."

"Don't fall in love with me," said Mrs. Chal-

loner.

"How can I help it?" Garthe retorted.

"But then Mr. Challoner is in the way. It's safer, it's more proper, to set your heart on something younger, more disencumbered."

"To the man who is looking for a primrose it

is no use to point to a bed of violets."

"You are very particular. Most of us have to take what comes in our way," said Mrs. Challoner, who liked Garthe better and better all the time.

Constance had been following the dialogue with interest, absorbed in Garthe, in his looks, in his words, in the meaning behind his words, all the while gathering impressions of him, and experiencing more than once—as Mrs. Challoner pressed questions which must stir memories more or less painful—a vague uneasiness, a sympathetic alarm. When he stood the test with no sign of restless vanity, no poignancy of feeling, she experienced a sensation of relief which was almost like a personal joy.

Kathleen was talking of egoism and altruism.

"Now Constance wants things with all her heart and soul," she observed, "yet she never in her life felt that anything belonged to her. Her joy in possession is having things to give me."

At this speech Garthe's face lighted up with a smile which flashed first at Kathy, then spent itself on Constance.

"It is Constance he prefers," said John Marchmont, who was on the watch.

Mrs. Challoner was praising the salad-dressing. Never had she tasted such a mayonnaise, she declared: seasoned to a marvel, at once cool, penetrating, and piquant.

"We were born so, like your cook," explained Kathy. "We never went to a cooking-school. All that is necessary is to know how to beat, then beat and beat and beat and beat all in one direction. You see," she went on confidentially to Garthe, "Constance and I go to great dinners which ought to appall us, —dinners which cost almost anything a head. But such extravagance does not appall us. In return we invite Mrs. Challoner and other millionaires here to eat a meal which costs nothing in particular. But everybody seems to have just as good a time."

"Your cuisine is exquisite," said Mrs. Challoner. "Meanwhile I ask for more of the mayonnaise."

"These two little coquettes understand even the coquetry of the kitchen," said John Marchmont.

"It's all Constance," said Kathy. "All the light, order, thrift, regularity, in this house emanate from her!"

"Evidently," said Constance, "Kathy wishes me to praise her, but that is not necessary."

"Now," insisted Kathy, "let us each have money in our purse and go out. We come to a shop and see something I cannot live without. Constance says, 'Do you really think that is what you want?' It is what I have been longing for from the beginning of the world, I tell her. I buy it and come home, feeling that I am the cleverest woman in New York, buying the right thing at the right moment; next morning I wake up without any money in my purse and feeling that I have bought the wrong thing at the wrong moment. Accordingly, Constance goes and gets me what I need."

"You describe me exactly," said Hartley; "only, as I never by any chance have any money in my purse to pay for it, I have the bill at the end of the month."

"I like running up bills. And some people say," observed Kathy thoughtfully, "it is safer to put your money in the bank and give checks; but even in banks money has a way of disappearing mysteriously so that you can't account for it. Once when I saw Mr. Garner drawing checks I said I could imagine nothing more delightful than having a check-book all to one's self. Accordingly he gave me one, and put money in the bank in my name. I felt like a capitalist. It was so nice to fill out those blank forms. I did it whenever I had a chance, and even Mr. Garner said I did it beau-

tifully. But all at once when I was going on swimmingly he came to me, holding up his hands. 'My dear child,' he cried, 'you've overdrawn your account.' I did not understand what he meant, and he explained that I had used up all the money, and more. I insisted that it was impossible. I proved it, too, for I brought the book, and I had not used more than half the checks. I never could understand how, when there they were, the money was still gone."

Kathy liked to fling herself into her story bodily, as it were, and now, as she had probably moved her feet in sympathy with her little gesticulations, she had contrived to drop her slipper under the table. Then having come to this point, she blushed, looked exceedingly disconcerted, and went on, trying to grope and recover the lost article, saying, with quite a different look, manner, and voice:—

"So Mr. Garner took away my eheck-book, and said, 'Buy what you like, ehild, and send the bills to me.' So afterwards I bought what I liked and sent the bills to him."

Everybody was gazing at the speaker, wondering what had suddenly eclipsed her high spirits.

- "And did that please Mr. Garner?" Mrs. Challoner inquired, to break the pause that ensued.
- "Not invariably," replied Kathy with a sigh and seeming ready to slip out of her chair.
- "Nothing about his wife's expenditures ever does quite please a man," said Mrs. Challoner sooth-

ingly, wondering why the hostess did not give the signal for the ladies to rise.

"Perhaps that is the reason you all like Ibsen," Hartley suggested.

Still, Kathy, with a look of trouble and indecision, writhed in her chair.

"Well, mamma dear," said Constance, herself making the move; and covered with confusion, and by the most desperate effort, Kathy started to her feet and, clutching at Constance's arm, limped to the door, passing Mr. Marchmont and Hartley, who were holding back the portières, with a shyness which forbade her to raise her eyes.

"Mercy on us!" said Mrs. Challoner as the ladies gained the hall. "What has happened to you?"

For answer Kathy lifted a little foot in a black silk stocking.

"I lost it," she said tragically.

The men inside heard Mrs. Challoner's peal of laughter, and at the same moment Garthe stooped and picked up a very small black satin slipper.

"Only a woman's shoe," he said, as he put it on the table, "but what a pretty one!"

"Well, you are a Prince Charming. I hide my diminished head," said Hartley. "That accounts for our hostess's embarrassment. She loses everything,—slippers, gloves, handkerchiefs, hairpins, and brooches. It comes from her way of throwing herself into her subject without being sure she can scramble out again."

John Marchmont looked at the slipper, quite staggered. His envy was palpable, at least to Garthe.

"Then her grasp of finance is so original," pursued Hartley. "She once confided to me that her husband used to tell her that often as he supposed he had got to the very end of her ignorance, she constantly surprised him by a fresh instance."

"Her mistakes are charming," said John March-

mont.

"Oh, I grant that, - I grant it easily."

"And for my part I admire a woman with a touch of the child about her, who never quite grows up."

"She is quite sufficiently clever," said Hartley. "She knows what piques and interests and amuses men."

"You should not even suggest that she poses as more naïve and ingenuous than she is," insisted John Marchmont with some heat. "She could not pose. Her cleverness, if you call it cleverness, owes everything to its spontaneity. Unless she is in a state of effervescence she is not in the least clever. It is only when she is bubbling over."

He kept his eye all the while on the little highheeled satin slipper, and at a moment when Hartley had turned away contrived to possess himself of it and, with a quick questioning glance at Garthe, thrust it inside his waistcoat. This glance seemed to ask, "Do you claim the privilege of restoring it to her?" Garthe shook his head with a little gesture that he waived all right. That shadowy index pointed to a state of mind which made it seem sacrilege to Mr. Marchmont that indifferent eyes should rest upon this trophy or profane hands touch it. This jugglery interested Garthe, to whom it lighted up much that he could not otherwise have guessed; but when Hartley suddenly perceived that the slipper was gone he mistook its destination and supposed it was Garthe who had appropriated it, monopolizing the right of restoring it in his own way and at his own time.

This slight incident, crowning as it did an evening's experience in which everything had shown him he no longer enjoyed his old privileges and preëminence, gave a turn to the scale. The state of mind it evolved in Hartley was not without influence upon his fortunes.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE GODS ARRIVE.

No matter what his experience of life may have been, in a man of thirty the germinal principle of hope is always strong, and what Garthe felt in meeting Constance Garner and in his sudden impression of warmth, fragrance, charm, was a healthy reaction from his apathy, a quick leap of his blood towards freedom, action, and enjoyment. Why should he, he now questioned his conscience, give up dejectedly, as if he had forfeited his right to a man's place in the world, - as if for him the point of honor was to be a human being with nothing in common with other human beings? For six years he had repressed all personal emotions as if he had no individual cravings, wishes, or aspirations. The sense of outrage he had not avenged, of anger he had not vented, of injustice nothing could set right, had separated him from mankind, had especially interposed a barrier between him and all women. had been always some fresh work to throw himself into, - experiment, study, travel, adventure, - nothing came amiss. His intellect had been stimulated, and he had given himself no time to realize that he was debarred from men's everyday

pleasures and pursuits, his heart was beating and his life passing in vain.

He had Larry, and Larry was enough, until he met Constance Garner and everything was changed. It was at first a troublesome pleasure dearly bought. It had been impossible to decline Mrs. Garner's verbal invitation to dinner given at the theatre, and he had besides a wish to meet the girl and find out the reason of her wistful glance,—a glance which seemed to question, appeal, recognize, and almost, he might have said, invite. He had made no advances, but something, he knew not exactly what, of clear womanly interest betrayed itself in her eyes, her smile, her whole expression, and she made no effort to hide it.

After he had seen her at home in a white gown with a bunch of English violets in the lace at her throat, he was farther than ever from forgetting her. They talked together of Kathy, of indifferent things, and she said to him:—

"You will go to Mrs. Challoner's?"

"Since she is kind enough to ask me, I say to myself, 'Why not?'" he replied, flushing slightly.

"Yes, why not?" she repeated with some archness.

"But hitherto I have said, when invited to go anywhere, 'Why should I?""

"I know," she exclaimed with instant sympathy.

"For four years we went nowhere, and at first we shrank from it. But now even Kathy enjoys

the change. It helps one to meet new people, to exchange ideas, to have new thoughts."

Garthe flushed again. She had made it clear by her glance as well by her words that she was acquainted with the outside facts of his life; but the very ease with which she alluded to his loneliness showed that she considered his fate nothing out of the common.

- "New thoughts may be very charming," he said.
- "But you like old thoughts better?"
- "No." He looked at her, met her glance raised to his, her whole face showing an eagerness to hear what he was to say. "In fact, I try never to think. I go straight on, which is sometimes dangerous."
  - "Dangerous?"

Her eyes lifted to his, then fell.

- "But I shall go to Mrs. Challoner's," he observed.
- "And to the studio-party?"
- "Gladly."

Certainly, he said to himself, if a man did not at least hazard the experiment, if his inclination did not answer this soft appeal, this clear invitation, he must be a poor creature.

Meanwhile it was all for the sake of Kathleen that Constance was offering this subtle flattery to a man whose possibilities of feeling it was hardly safe to gauge by those of men like Hartley, men whose actual aspirations were towards a high standard of social approval, good fellowship, a knowledge of the correct thing in ties and coats, a knowingness about

yachts, stables, athletics, and the gossip of the town. Not but that she divined very different qualities in Garthe, the very qualities she desired to enlist in liking for Kathy; for Kathy, so generous herself, so susceptible, so crystalline, so transparent, so utterly devoid of egotism and vanity, so unconscious of her own prettiness, so irresistibly delightful and amusing, her very folly full of a freshness which never palled!

In fact the idea that Garthe — whose tone, look and manner had roused belief in her and laid a charm on her — must naturally and inevitably fall in love with Kathy, and of course she with him, had instantly fascinated the heart and head of Constance.

"I am thankful it was Mr. Marchmont and not Mr. Hartley, or particularly not Mr. Garthe, who picked up my slipper," Kathy had said, on the evening of the dinner party, after the guests had gone away. She sat extending the tips of her pointed toes beyond her gown, looking down at them and reflecting, possibly with some complacency, upon the little ceremony which had just taken place. Mr. Marchmont, lingering behind the other guests, had produced the slipper, saying suddenly, "Oh, by the way, is this ridiculous little thing yours?" and after scolding her for losing it, had insisted on kneeling down and trying it on, as if he were in doubt whether hers were the foot it fitted.

"Why particularly not Mr. Garthe?" asked

Constance, whose secret thought was perhaps that he would have made the situation more interesting.

"That would have been horrible, horrible," cried Kathy. "Even with Mr. Marchmont nothing but the desire to get back my new, pretty, useful slipper made me confess that it was mine."

"People have lost slippers before, and people have found slippers before; there was Cinderella

and Prince Charming."

- "But that could n't apply to me and Mr. Marchmont!" said Kathy, still looking at the pointed toes.
  - "Why not to you?"
- "Cinderella was a young girl," said Kathy with a sigh.
- "You are not very old. It always seems to me that I am older and more experienced than you, and even I am not, so to speak, old. Of course Mr. Marchmont is not just one's ideal of Prince Charming, but Mr. Garthe might play the part."
- "Mr. Garthe is not so very young or so very handsome."
- "Not handsome like Mr. Hartley, but he has a striking face."
  - "Not so striking as Mr. Marchmont's."
- "Oh, nobody is like Mr. Marchmont, dear old man," said Constance. "But Mr. Garthe's face is full of quick sympathy and interest. He is not a talker, but he makes his presence felt. When Mr. Hartley used to come here so often he was

always telling what he liked and what he disliked,
— what did not seem easy and pleasant to him he
seemed to feel it not worth while to attempt to do.
Now Mr. Garthe—"

- "Yes, I know," murmured Kathy with a vague smile and sigh, "one sees that Mr. Garthe is very different from Mr. Hartley."
- "Mr. Garthe," Constance proceeded, "looks calm and proud, yet you never feel that he is indifferent, that he has a thought of his good looks, or of saying something clever. He is the kind of man who seems not severe, who—"
- "Ye-es," said Kathy, rather startled by Constance's animation, and transferring her gaze from the tips of her slippers to the girl's face. She seemed never before to have had an adequate perception of its beauty.
- "Why, Constance," she exclaimed, "can it be that you are just a little a little bewitched with this Mr. Garthe?"
- "I bewitched with Mr. Garthe?" Constance repeated gayly. "Well, no, Kathy dear, I shall never do anything so unpractical as to suffer myself to be bewitched with men who are in love with you."

Kathy shrank away like a child struck a blow, and her face flamed.

- "In love with me?" she said incredulously.
- "Have I not eyes? Have I not ears? He stood and talked about you after he came in from the dining-room."

"What did he say?" asked Kathy breathlessly.

"He said that you carried round a visible aureole."

"He only meant my hair."

"He said you had the most delightful voice."

"He hadn't heard Mr. Marchmont tell how when I first came North I used to say 'It has just done come struck twelve o'clock.'"

"He asked if he might call on our Tuesdays."

"But everybody comes on our Tuesdays."

"And he is going to Mrs. Challoner's, although it has been his way never, never to go out."

Kathy drew a breath of relief. "I don't think he is going to Mrs. Challoner's to see me," she observed.

"Of course I cannot give an idea of the feeling behind his words," Constance exclaimed. "I saw his glance rest on you, I—" She broke off, feeling that she was possibly passing the limits of wise discretion, and for a few minutes both were silent.

"Constance," Kathy murmured after a pause, her features showing that there was some conflict of mind going on.

"Well, dear?"

"I want to ask you a question."

"I am ready to hear it."

"You will answer it?"

"Of course, if I can."

"Solemnly, I mean; not out of any idea of pleasing or displeasing me, but out of your heart and soul, out of your religious convictions."

Constance looked at her in surprise.

- "Of course I will. Not that my opinion is worth having."
- "Oh, yes, it is. You are cleverer than I am, Constance. Then besides, you are always the same. You keep your head. If you believe in a thing to-day you believe in it to-morrow, while if I go to bed with one idea on a subject I am sure to wake up thinking just the contrary."
- "I don't judge so highly of my own wisdom," said Constance humbly, recalling the mistakes she had made, "but tell me what it is, Kathy."
- "Half a dozen times," faltered Kathy, with tears coming to her eyes, "it has been on the tip of my tongue."
  - "Let me hear it."
  - "You understand that you are to be sincere."
  - "Absolutely sincere."
- "Of course you will not fancy it has reference to anybody in particular, — it is a mere general question."
- "I had taken it for granted it was to be something about yourself."
- "Oh dear, no," said Kathy, horror struck at the suggestion. "I should die before I would ask such a question about myself."
  - "Tell me what it is, of course then I shall

know it has no reference to you whatever," said Constance, growing more and more eager.

- "Oh, I could n't ask it now," answered Kathy mournfully.
  - "Oh, but Kathy!"
- "Not now; as it is, I feel ready to sink through the floor."

But upheld, encouraged, and inspired by Constance's sympathy, she was finally induced to reconsider, and to begin. "Do you think—" then she broke off. "Dear, should you mind just for one minute not staring hard at me?" After a brief pause,—"Do you think," she went on with more resolution, "that—it—is—right—for—widows—to—marry again?"

- "Yes," said Constance with instant decision.
- "Really?" murmured Kathy, incredulous. "Do you really consider it right?"

Her conscience thus addressed, Constance halted a little.

Then after a pause she said, "I'll tell you, Kathy. If a woman has made an ideally perfect marriage,—if she has been deeply and truly in love with her husband and he with her, and they have had a really perfect happiness, why then, unless there was some powerful reason, it does not seem to me as if—"

"As if she ought to marry again," said Kathy. Her lips quivered slightly; she seemed half stifled. "I was sure that would be the way you felt about it," she added, "and I'm sure you are quite right. I have great faith in your judgment, Constance, and I—I just like to have questions settled beyond the reach of controversy. It is so confusing to have two sides to things. Just fancy, suppose we could n't be certain about the Ten Commandments, but had to argue the matter every time a temptation came up."

"But you did not understand me, Kathy," said Constance. "It is only in certain cases that it seems to me wrong for a widow to marry. When she has been absolutely happy — when —"

"At any rate," said Kathy resignedly, "that is my case. No woman was ever so happy as I was."

- "I know," faltered Constance, "but, Kathy dear, you had no children."
- "I have you, Constance," said Kathy with caressing sweetness. "I could n't love you better if you were my own daughter." Still with all this sweetness and philosophy there were signs of some conflict of feeling in her face.
- "Of course," Constance said, with clear compunctions, "I should not wish you to marry again unless you had some great inducement, unless a second marriage were to give you what you had hitherto missed."
- "I did not miss anything," cried Kathy, with poignant feeling.
- "I have sometimes felt that you must have missed something in marrying a man so far beyond

your own age," said Constance in the softest voice.

"Of course I know that you were happy with papa,
— of course I know he loved you —"

"He loved me dearly," interrupted Kathy with tears in her eyes. "Of course I never could feel that he cared for me just as he had cared for your mother; I was too young and foolish."

"What I mean is that one can be young only once,—ean have an emotion for the first time only once. Papa had had his life; he had made his career; he did not care for things which amused you, but liked to sit by and look on and see you enjoy. Don't you remember how it was to me you turned for real sympathy?"

"I liked him to sit by and look on. I was very happy."

"He was so much older than you."

"I should n't have liked him half so well if he had been younger," said Kathy. "Nobody I ever saw or heard of was half as happy as I was, and I see now that it could never be right for me even to think of marrying again."

She had not the look or manner of a woman who has a great deal at stake, and Constance thought it as well not to debate the point. Kathy had confessed that it was her way to go to bed dominated by one view of a question and to wake up convinced on the opposite side. Evidently she had begun to think of the possibility of marrying again, and it was not strange that she should have at least a

momentary fit of remorse, for she was looking forward ardently to meeting Garthe at Mrs. Challoner's and at the studio-party.

Bowhill, as Mr. Marchmont's place was called, was about twelve miles out of town. The artist had some twenty years before put up a sort of lodge in the woods, consisting of a single large room for a summer studio, and to this he had gradually added a porch, an entrance hall, dining-room, and bedrooms, so that he finally had a very pretty, rambling, and picturesque house in a pleasant country with plenty of agreeable neighbors, at least in summer time, for the town had expanded in his direction. He had painted a good many pictures in his early life, but now-a-days kept a canvas on his easel a long time, finding it a difficult matter to feel that his work was finished; refining on his idea with endless touchings and retouchings,- feeling more and more that he was not quite master of his own imagina-He no longer needed to work for money, and, without that powerful incentive, art for art's sake made him lose a good many hours in reverie over the achievements of greater men than himself who had done so easily what he longed to do and could not. He passed too many of his days in endless musings over his easel or the fire, in pacings to and fro. Kathleen Garner was spoiling his existence, no doubt of that. She was perpetually in his thoughts; at every turn, thoughts, aspirations, schemes, connected with her, leaped into life. She

could so easily put order, beauty, and logic into his life, and yet at present she caused him only confusion of mind and purpose.

How young she was! how young everybody was, he said to himself the day of his studio tea, as he watched the group approaching through his grounds. It was a clear, cold, crisp winter's afternoon. The ground was frozen, and generally bare, although here and there were patches of snow and ice. Kathleen Garner and Lawrence Garthe were leading the way, the former in a seal-skin jacket, cap and muff, her cheeks and lips rosy as a child's and her eyes full of light. Mrs. Challoner, who was chaperoning the party, and who had thought it worth while to add half a dozen young people to the original group invited, in order to have the affair go off well, was, he said to himself, his only contemporary.

"How young and happy you all look," was his exclamation as he received them at the door of his studio. "Come in, come in. There is my Cazin, Mrs. Challoner."

The room resembled a shrine, rather than the museum of art objects, tapestries and curios, which, combining in an orgy of dazzling color, make up the popular idea of a painter's studio. An air of purity, of severity, of classic order prevailed. There was no jumble. The Cazin had an alcove almost to itself along with a quiet landscape of Daubigny's and a mellow sunset behind a row of

poplars edging a pond, by Corot. There were four of these alcoves, lighted by large windows opening on beautiful views, each alcove containing some distinguishing picture or series of sketches, and three or four seats for a group of people to sit down. In the main body of the room were casts of the works of the great sculptors, and then towards the north was a platform with a cold white light, and to-day set out with two or three completed pictures on the easels.

"They say they like my studio," Mr. Marchmont observed to Garthe, "but I doubt if they do. The fashion of the town is for gaudy effects, whereas I must have cool color and the perfect line to content and tranquilize me."

The two men were standing together while the other groups distributed themselves about the alcoves or fluttered about before the easels, admiring, discussing, chattering, and laughing.

"You live here alone?" said Garthe.

"I live here all alone for some nine months of the year; then after Christmas go to town until Easter. I built first the square room with windows to the north, then I added a bedroom and a kitchen, then a porch and a hall, and a dining-room; finally a library and bedrooms round the gallery above. It has grown out of an idea that I wanted a bit of solitude, and has surprised me by what it has developed into, as many of my ideas do, seeming to have a lease of life quite independent of me, like children of the parents who beget them."

"You never married, I believe," said Garthe.

"No; at the time of life when men think of marrying I had my mother and a sister ten years younger than myself always with me; I had, besides, my art, — indeed, I ought to say, chiefly my art, for I was intoxicated with my work. I lived in it, I cared little or nothing for anything else; it was completely satisfying. What tormented me in women was not my longing to call one of them Mrs. John Marchmont, but to transfer the soul of her beauty to canvas,— and that it is not an easy matter to do."

"No, — I suppose men are better subjects."

"Not if a woman is identified with an idea. course nothing is so charming as a blooming young girl, but no artist, who understands the limitations of art, cares to undertake her unless he can put her into an Annunciation or make her a sibyl or a saint. or show in her a presentiment of early death. is human personality one demands in a portrait, the subtle, the spiritual side of the subject. A child is always good material, but women have almost no artistic character at all until they have found out what life is, what suffering is, and what submission is. I saw a woman, as I waited before the gate at the railway station the other day, and I could not get her out of my head until I had made twenty sketches of her. She could n't have been more than thirty, but you saw on the instant that she had been through every sort of experience;

had loved, been married, had had children, and, no doubt, lost some; for, from the beautiful submissive lines about her mouth, she had known grief, had eaten her bread with tears, had not only wept but despaired, had been conquered by life, and yet she had conquered. Leonard might have painted her as a pendant to the Gioconda — for this woman, too, smiled; smiled with an unfathomable smile of sweetness and serenity."

"Fair or dark?" asked Garthe.

"Fair,—hair of pure gold. She had not aged, she had only *lived*," he sighed. "She was eminently pictorial," he added.

"And you could not follow her, could not find out who she was, could not induce her to sit for you?"

"No, I stood aside to let her pass; our eyes met, and the chance was over. No doubt she still recalls me as the old man who stared at her as we stood together by the gate waiting to have the official punch our tickets. I only hope the right sort of fellow sits down opposite her at table, but I am afraid."

"It is something in the way of an experience," Garthe said slowly and reluctantly as if the words were forced from him, "for a man to see the idea of a woman which he has cherished in his deepest instincts, venerated in his soul, and looked forward to as his chance of salvation, clothed in visible, tangible beauty."

"I had n't that feeling at all," John Marchmont made haste to say. "I should like to paint her portrait, or to put her in a group at the foot of the crucifix as the mother of God, but—"

"It is another woman you wish to have sit opposite you at table," said Garthe, smiling and thinking of the slipper episode.

"Quite another woman," said John Marchmont.
"Suppose we go and ask Constance Garner for a

cup of tea."

The tea-table was spread in the great hall, on the table by the chimney corner. Mrs. Challoner and Constance were dividing the honors, and Kathleen, sharing the duties, brought a cup of tea in each hand, offering them to Mr. Marchmont and Garthe.

"Is the party going off to suit you, madam?"

the artist inquired.

"Ye-es," said Kathleen. She glanced at Garthe. "It was pleasant, was it not, Mr. Garthe, coming out on the train?"

"It was charming," returned Garthe, who had taken the cup of tea, but, without tasting it, stood looking wistfully at the tea-table, or at the girl who presided at the samovar.

"Then the walk here," Kathy pursued. "It was like coming through a great park, and the wind roared in the trees like a fugue of Bach's. Did you not enjoy it, Mr. Garthe?"

"Very much," returned Garthe absently, his eyes fastened on Constance, who had risen from her seat. "Some affairs seem to me so long," Kathleen pursued; "but now I am hating to see the sun go down. I do not want this day to end."

Garthe had turned to her an instant with a dazzling smile.

"Excuse me," he said, and like a flash darted forward and vanished.

"There, he has gone!" said Mr. Marchmont in an odd voice. "You have nobody left but me."

Kathy gazed after the fugitive with a sort of bewilderment.

- "Young men are so—so odd," she observed. "I don't think I like them."
- "Garthe evidently wished to speak to Constance," said Mr. Marchmont soothingly. "He will come back."
- "Oh, I do not wish him to come back particularly," said Kathleen. "I am so hungry I feel like sitting down and eating sandwiches and buttered muffins and scones, and with you I do not mind."
- "No, there is that comfort in an old fellow like me; he does not count any more than one's grandmother."
- "I like it," said Kathleen, sinking among the cushions of the chimney-corner seat. Mr. Marchmont drew a low table before her, and transferring to it a fair share of the contents of the general teatable, endeavored at least to satisfy her physical hunger. "I like it," she said again, smiling at him. "You take such good care of me."

"Old dogs are apt to be well trained," he answered, sitting down beside her.

"I don't think," murmured Kathleen, half in reverie, "that I quite understand young men. Now there was Mr. Hartley —"

"Yes; by the way, Hartley has not come. I think a eard from him arrived by post."

"We hardly ever see him now," said Kathleen.
"He stopped coming all at once. For a year, when
the door-bell rang, we would say to each other,
'There is Mr. Hartley,' and the door opened and
there he was. Then suddenly—" she mused smilingly, flushed slightly, and added hastily, "I suppose he found something pleasanter to do."

Mr. Marchmont, vaguely troubled in his conscience, looked at her lovely wistful eyes, the meaning of their glance enhanced by the blue circle beneath. Any one looking into their depths must feel the absolute candor and simplicity of her nature; yet with all her goodness and sincerity she seemed to him enigmatical.

"I don't believe you missed Hartley," he observed.

"Oh, no;" her face lighted up, — "for just then Mr. Garthe came."

"You like Garthe better."

"A great deal better. Still—" she paused as she took a fresh muffin. "I don't think," she observed, "that I quite understand young men. You see," she added, with a flash of insight, "I did

not have my innings as a girl. I had no chance to go to balls; I never had my fair share of lovers,—there are no young men at the South to fall in love, so that I had no experience."

- "You had one lover, apparently an effective one."
- "I cannot imagine whom you mean," said Kathleen, puzzled.
- "Of course I mean the man you married, who carried you off at an age when most girls have not put up their hair."
- "I do not call him a lover. That was different. Bernard was Bernard."
  - Mr. Marchmont considered this rather charming.
- "Bernard was Bernard, evidently something quite out of the commonplace category."
- "Yes, Bernard was Bernard," affirmed Kathy, with a pink flush rising to her face. "So I went into society first as a married woman. I was a matron all at once. I was taken out to dinner by all the old gentlemen, and oh," with a grimace, "how some old gentlemen can prose!"
- "Oh, can't they!" ejaculated Mr. Marchmont with a visible shudder. "I beg of you to draw a veil over their infirmities. Such an allusion strikes home."
- "I hope," Garthe had said as he found Constance sitting alone quietly in the alcove which contained the new picture, "that you will accept

this cup of tea to cheer your solitude," and he extended the untouched cup he still carried in his hand.

"That is the very cup I made for you, that I sent to you by Kathy," said Constance. She was smiling. The occasion had been to her a pleasant one. She and Garthe had not hitherto spoken that day except to exchange greetings, but she had seen him with Kathleen and both had worn an air of enjoyment. "It is very ungrateful of you to give it away."

"Not to be ungrateful," returned Garthe, and drank the tea.

"Rather cold, I fear, by this time," suggested Constance.

"Rather cold and rather sweet," said Garthe. "But now that I have swallowed it, may I sit down with you and look at the Cazin?"

"Where is Kathleen?"

"Mrs. Garner? Oh, surrounded, as usual. It would be of no use for me to try to get in a word. You gay people have so much to say to each other, I feel a clod compared with you. On the way out we all laughed irresistibly over such incredibly droll stories. Some man had dressed in a hurry to go out to dinner, and on arriving had found himself with one low shoe and silk stocking, and one high walking boot and woolen sock. But that was nothing to another man who had gone out to Tuxedo to stay over night for a ball; and instead of

having his full complement of evening clothes, was short in some important particular. The story of his various attempts to make up the deficiency was so amusing, and so stimulating, that we all ransacked our brains to recall some equally exquisite incident."

Constance looked at him with the expression in her face which he had come by this time to know well; it was made up of observation, curiosity, a clear and definite desire to understand what he said and what he felt.

- "Trifles amuse one when one is happy," she said.
- "Yes; and to-day I was amused. I have been very light-hearted of late, when one considers that a while ago I thought I had not a ray of hope in my heart."

She looked at him in silence, her beautiful eyes full of sympathy. She longed to say something about Kathleen, but perhaps it was enough that he was clearly thinking of her.

- "I get up in the morning, now-a-days, with a feeling that something pleasant is going to happen, and it happens," said Garthe. "It has all been interesting to-day, for even while I laugh a little at the talk that goes on, it is diverting; and when anybody tells simply what they know and what has happened, nobody is bored. But now, - let me sit down with you and look at the Cazin."
- "Oh, yes," said Constance. "I am looking at the sunset, too, out-of-doors."

"Yes, the sunset."

Each, turning as they spoke, uttered an exclamation. There was the little new moon shining clear above the mellow crimson and golden glow of the west.

"I like to see the new moon over my right shoulder," said Constance. "It is my one super-stition."

"So it is mine. Let us accept the augury." He glanced at her. "Is there anything you desire very much?" he asked, with a little glimmer of a smile which, for some inexplicable reason, she found it a difficult matter to meet.

"Oh, yes," she answered, dropping her eyes. "I wish something very much."

"I am thirty years old," he said in a low voice.

"I thought I had got over that childish sort of passion; but I find myself now-a-days longing for something, like a beggar for food and raiment." She longed to shake off an influence which seemed more and more to bind her; she must surely have something to say about Kathy, but she could not speak. "Look just there," he went on, "just where those oak trees show their branches against the west."

"I see only the sky," she said, fixing her eyes in the direction he had indicated.

"Look steadily a moment."

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed joyfully, and glanced at him, her face radiant. Where there had been,

a moment before, only the mellow blending of the sunset colors into the violet above, and where the most intent gaze could discern nothing, suddenly, as if newly created, a point of brightness had come. It was the evening star.

Garthe sighed.

- "Mr. Marchmont is a fine fellow," he observed. "I like him."
  - "I love him."
- "Enviable man, all round. To begin with, this is a pleasant house."
- "Is n't it? It is just my idea of a house. Each window in it is just more delightful than the others. Sometimes in summer we come here with Mrs. Challoner and stay a week. I have the room above this, and although one has only a glimpse of the river here, there one sees it all round the bluff, and the pine wood as well."
- "You love the country? You would like to live in the country?" Garthe asked in the softest voice in the world.
- "It would make me perfectly happy to live in the country. I always go away from it, my eyes unsatisfied with seeing and my ears with hearing."
- "I know the sensation," said Garthe, smiling. "I like that phrase."
  - "Do you like the country so well?"
- "Hitherto I have preferred cities, that is, unless I can have really wild nature."
  - "Kathy loves the town and everything belonging

to it," said Constance. "She says she had too much of the country as a child; that it means, now-a-days, separation from what she loves best. When we are away, she declares that she pines for pavements, noise, crowds, hurry, and dust, and that when she comes back, she longs to embrace the first policeman she sees. But then," Constance added hastily, as if fearful of having given a wrong impression, "she is equally happy and at home everywhere. She lives, actually, in her affections; but unluckily she has nothing except me to spend them on."

"Has she no family?"

"She was an only child, and lost her mother very early, and it was when papa found her all alone, after her father's death, when he had gone to Virginia to attend to some of his business as executor, that he fell in love, married her at once, and brought her to New York."

Garthe drew her on to more intimate confidences. She withheld nothing which could show him how happy they had been together, how beyond all others Kathy was dear, lovable, good, and amusing, putting charm into whatever she undertook. She little comprehended how, in each touch with which she painted another, she was expressing herself to Garthe's perceptions. All at once came a summons from Mrs. Challoner, news that everybody was going back to town.

"Is it over?" murmured Garthe as if incredulous.

"And I have kept you here," said Constance remorsefully. "Why did I let you stay? Why

did you run away from the others?"

"Why did you let me stay?" he asked, looking at her with a direct glance. "Why did I run away from the others? You know—you must know—that I came to-day simply to see you,—that my only object in going anywhere is to be with you. I think of nothing else."

## CHAPTER V.

## HARTLEY FINDS AN OBJECT IN LIFE.

"A widow, is she?" said Ferdinand Hartley.

"Let us call her a widow. Sometimes it is just as well not to be too precise. If she does not lay up her husbands in the kingdom of heaven she yet gets rid of them in some decent fashion. She comes from a region where divorces grow on every bush."

"Oh, divorced?"

"I have no reason for saying that she is divorced, only that somehow she seems to me not to have the rig of a widow. I have not inquired about the late Hernandez, and I may be doing her an injustice."

"Your brother ought to have found out something about her private history."

"He found out sufficient for his purpose, and he no doubt thinks that it's well to be satisfied with the sufficient," said Joseph Roylance, a somewhat precise, cautious man who went into no matter whose depth he had not tested. "She brought him letters from his Pacific Coast correspondent which have been properly authenticated. She possesses undoubted securities, many of them in the name of

Aurelio Hernandez; and her own signature, Anna Isabella Hernandez, is good for almost any amount."

"She must be rich," mused Hartley.

"No more doubt about her being rich than there is about her being young and good-looking."

"What is she doing here in New York all alone?"

"She is not alone. She has a companion, a Miss Shepard, who is not an ordinary sheep-dog, but a woman with a career; wants to reform something; I am not quite sure what it is she wants to reform,- perhaps men. God knows, some of us need it. Any doubts about the unimpeachable respectability of Mrs. Hernandez will die a natural death the moment you see Miss Shepard. You could n't touch her with a ten-foot pole."

"It all seems odd, out of the way. I should like to understand clearly what brings Mrs. Hernandez to New York."

"You are mighty particular all of a sudden. As a rule it is not I but somebody else who longs to rush into speculations which the elect are afraid of. Why should any one come to New York? To be young, good-looking, rich, and a widow, does not preclude a desire for novelty, some wish to enlarge one's experience. Perhaps - who knows she may be looking for a successor to the late But to come back to the Aurelio Hernandez. point, - will you or will you not accept Mrs. John Roylance's invitation to dinner next Wednesday?"

Perhaps convinced by these explanations and these arguments, perhaps because his disinclinations had been a matter of vanity and whim only, Hartley accepted without further demur. He had heard not a little about John Roylance's new client within the past few weeks, but in a way to repel as much as to attract. He had all his life piqued himself upon his fastidious insistence upon the very best things, and he hated to recognize any deterioration, any acceptance of which was secondrate. Still what he was told about the wealth of this possibly dubious widow adapted itself to his naïve love of magnificence. And there come epochs in the lives of the most brilliant people when the original impulse seems to have exhausted itself, when to the first bubble, sparkle, effervescence, succeeds flatness. Since his painful half-hour at the Garners' three weeks before, everything had been dull to Hartley. Nothing could look more hopeless than his future in the world in which he had ever shone, but where now he seemed to have dwindled from a chief actor into a mere looker-on. In his devotion to the Garners, he had for more than a year given up his general social preëminence; other men had pushed into his place and he now felt himself crowded out. His face was strange to the young girls, who considered him antiquated, and passed him by for boys with whom he would make no effort to compete. A more romantic man in such a situation might have pressed

his heart into the service of his grievance and believed that his present lack of high spirits proceeded from his disappointment in his love-affair. But he was at all events no sentimentalist. Love, he said to himself, was like pebble soup, very good and very nourishing if well flavored with thyme, parsley, rosemary, pepper, salt, and a substantial marrowbone. What he still hated to think of was his ineffectual waste of effort and material, his time,—his bouquets, his bonbons, his books. It made him almost cynical to hear that Garthe was pursuing under every advantage his acquaintance with Mrs. Garner.

"I sow and others reap," he said to himself. "I lay eggs and others incubate them."

Still he reflected on his good services in Garthe's behalf with some complacency, always piquing himself on being a good fellow, a warm-hearted fellow, a better fellow than others, not to say a brighter. The more the pity, then, that circumstances forced him to decline on a lower range of feelings than had moved him hitherto, although in his present restless and transitional mood it was something to have some clearly defined object of pursuit.

The John Roylances lived in Brooklyn in an ample, respectable way. They were not people of fashion, were wholly guiltless of worldly ambitions, and had experienced no slight embarrassment in offering attention to their rich, pretty client who had complained to the lawyer that she had been in

New York almost a month and had so far found it a most inhospitable place. Mrs. Hernandez's business had been for a year — and promised for some time to come to be — so profitable to John Roylance that he at once bestirred himself and consulted with his brother, who not only suggested giving a dinner, but promised that his partner, who was a man of high fashion and good looks, should be one of the guests. Thus it was a clear relief when Hartley, after going backwards and forwards, accepted the invitation with an air of concession.

"Of course," Joseph Roylance said, "you are in society, and John and his wife are not in society. But they are well off, and, when occasion demands, can step out handsomely. The affair may be a little heavy, but I can safely promise you a good dinner."

No sooner had Hartley met the mysterious stranger than he realized that it would have been one of the most foolish acts of his life to forego this opportunity. Roylance had not exaggerated: Mrs. Hernandez was still young, that is, her age could scarcely have been thirty, and she was rather startlingly handsome, with complexion of a rich creamy tint, ample dark hair which she wore massed on the top of her head and stuck full of diamondheaded pins like a Japanese matron, imperious black eyes beneath imperious black brows, and a saucy mouth with so short an upper lip that she seemed always on the point of uttering some lively

and impertinent speech. Considering the quiet nature of the occasion, she was perhaps too much dressed, but of such wealth as hers was reputed to be some visible sign was desirable. Hartley at least was not ready to find fault with her ostentation. He would himself have liked to take her out to dinner and to delight her with the piquancy of his wit, the felicity of his descriptions, and his happy dexterity in flattery. But of course she fell to the host instead, while Hartley, with the best grace he could muster, offered his arm to Mrs. Rovlance. He recovered from his disappointment to a degree when, on sitting down at table, he found that his right-hand neighbor was Miss Shepard, Mrs. Hernandez's friend, companion, and chaperon. Perhaps he considered her the key to the door of acquaintance with the rich widow. Perhaps his curiosity was piqued by Miss Shepard's own individual characteristics. At all events she interested him at once, although she sat through the early courses with her attention fixed wholly on the plate before her, glancing neither to the right nor left. She was tall and thin, of any age between thirty and fifty, neither young nor old, handsome nor ugly. She had a clear large-featured face with an expanded forehead, thoughtful yellowish eyes, a wide pliable mouth with peculiar curves. A little furrow between her brows seemed to indicate an easily perplexed and troubled earnestness of mind, but in general her whole expression was concentrated and alert.

Even while addressing a flood of polite nothings to his hostess he was all the time attentively observing her and waiting for an opportunity to compel her attention. Mrs. Roylance herself gave him the clue.

"Miss Shepard lectures; have you heard her?" she inquired.

"I have not yet had that pleasure," he replied; then, no longer withheld by lack of a subject, "I wonder if it was you who lectured on Ibsen?" he said, turning to her. "Mrs. Challoner was telling me about it a few nights ago."

Miss Shepard's lips had moved in nervous impatience as she overheard Mrs. Roylance's remarks. She replied:—

"Yes, it was I. I was introduced to Mrs. Challoner. She seemed to me a clever but very superficial sort of woman."

"Oh, we are all superficial," said Hartley.

"Unless people are in earnest I have no time to waste on them," said Miss Shepard stiffly, but at the same time regarding him with interest.

"Don't blame me for not being in earnest," he retorted. "It is not my fault but my misfortune that you look down upon me. Luckily you can't run away, and perhaps before dinner is over you may make me in earnest for the rest of my days. I was never properly equipped for life with fixed opinions, views, convictions, prejudices. Every subject in the world presents itself to me with the

inevitable interrogation point. Now there is Mrs. Roylance's brother-in-law, who enjoys Workingmen's meetings, Everybody's Rights' Associations, Reformers' Clubs; he serves on committees; he is vice-president, secretary, what not, of all sorts of societies; he likes to be preached at and lectured to by the hour. His particular pride is to receive tracts on all humanitarian subjects. He is my partner, and you will like him even if you can't like me."

Miss Shepard listened with a grim smile.

"I have all my life liked the wrong people," she remarked.

"Now I enjoy that sort of confession. It opens up a vista to the imagination."

"What I mean," she explained, "is that I like one set of ideas and, too often, another set of people."

"You don't realize your own power to impose your ideas upon people of the most opposite convictions," said Hartley. "Mrs. Challoner, — Mrs. Challoner, for example, whom you did not like, confided to me that she was so carried away by your Ibsenish theories she longed to run away from her husband."

"If he is a bad husband her impulse was quite right!"

"He is the best of husbands. She adores him, he adores her. But, don't you see, the irresistible logic of your discourse made her feel that any woman of proper feeling ought to be antagonistic to marriage."

Miss Shepard's face showed the kindling of feeling.

"If cause exists for antagonism, if she is restricted, limited, hindered, — if she does not feel that her soul is growing"—

"Who is not in some direction restricted, limited, hindered?" said Hartley. "I know that I am. I long to burst my trammels and have a chance for free play. Don't you, Mrs. Roylance?" turning back to his hostess.

"I do not quite understand," said Mrs. Roylance nervously.

"Were you never cramped by your environment?" demanded Hartley with an air of intense sympathy. "Do you feel that you are fully comprehended by those who are nearest and dearest to you,—do they not sometimes fail to give you absolute liberty to follow out the dictates of your own will?"

Mrs. Roylance looked startled.

"One does not expect it," she said guardedly.

"Did you never, for example, long to run away from Mr. Roylance?"

"Certainly not. I wonder you can speak of such a dreadful thing."

"Oh, it is Miss Shepard who urges it, not I," explained Hartley. "She thinks that if a woman has a grievance it should be redressed without loss of time."

"It is not in this world that a woman expects compensation," observed Mrs. Roylance.

Miss Shepard's eyes showed the glimmer of a smile.

- "One can see," she now remarked, addressing her hostess, "that Mr. Hartley is in the habit of taking the problems of life very lightly, at least those problems which confront modern women."
- "But the problems which confront modern men have to be taken lightly," Hartley struck in. "Nobody cares about our wrongs. If I were to address the universe because I was restless and unhappy, I should be considered absurd. Nobody suffers when I eat my heart out with grief because I cannot have what I want."
  - "What is it you want?"
- "Nothing but a good income, houses, equipages, an inexhaustible balance at my banker's."
- "There are plenty of men, and women too, who, like you, shirk the chief questions of life," said Miss Shepard.
- "I will do anything you suggest," retorted Hartley. "I feel like rushing into some extreme; like plunging headlong into a gulf, only make it clear to me what I ought to do."
- "I do not flatter myself that I am the prophet appointed to influence your life, Mr. Hartley. And indeed, if I am a voice crying in the wilderness, I have to confess that I hardly know what or whom it is that I announce."

- "I supposed it was Ibsen."
- "He understands women," Miss Shepard answered. "He understands that a woman is an individual being; that her duty to herself is paramount to all other duties; that she must be left free and unfettered to question her own conscience and decide upon her own course. For unless she is true to her inner sense of right, justice, and duty, she can be no true wife, mother, or friend."

"Ibsen is a man," Mrs. Roylance struck in with a quickening of expression in her large, calm face. "If he were a woman he would have found out that a woman is most herself when she forgets herself, rises above herself. He would have seen that if Nora Helmar had been really a sensible woman, she could have looked at the question of her husband's mistakes about her all round, and have smiled at them; and that if she were so impulsive as to be vexed with him even to the point of running away, she must have come back next morning before her children opened their eyes. But, of course, a man cannot know, and even a woman who has had no children cannot know, that it would have killed her to feel that they were missing her and calling for her."

Hartley, fancying that this wholly feminine shaft might have pierced to the quick and rankled in Miss Shepard, glanced at her in some dismay. But Miss Shepard seemed not hurt, only meditating, as if pondering the question from some fresh point of view.

"I don't say Nora was happy," she returned; then added, with a sudden flash of enlightenment, "No form of martyrdom is easy and pleasant, so far as I have ever heard."

"If I left my husband and children," exclaimed Mrs. Roylance with no little spirit, "I should not consider myself a martyr."

"But then, Mrs. Roylance," said Hartley, "you and I are not of the stuff of which reformers are made. We like comfort, respectability, substance, we like not being in the papers. It is Miss Shepard who is willing to walk with bleeding feet and cut brambles and briers out of our way. How is it," he inquired, turning to her, "about your charming friend, Mrs. Hernandez? Is she a reformer? Is she emancipated? Does she sympathize with your views?"

"In a way," answered Miss Shepard with an air of reserve.

" From afar off, I take it."

Miss Shepard was silent for a moment, then said in a low voice, "I should not call her, strictly speaking, a reformer. Still, while I am a mere echo of other peoples' advanced opinions, Mrs. Hernandez is capable of acting and drawing opinions after her."

Hartley glanced across the table at Mrs. Hernandez, who certainly did not pose as one of the emancipated, but had the air of a pretty woman who expects a full tribute of admiration from every man who addresses her.

## 118 THE STORY OF LAWRENCE GARTHE.

- "She seems to find herself in harmony with fate," said Hartley. "Has she a husband?"
  - "No, she is a widow."
  - "You spoke as if —"
- "He was a bad husband," murmured Miss Shepard. "For a time she was like a captive without hope of release,—then—"
  - "What happened?"
  - "He died suddenly."
  - " Died?"
- "That is, he was killed killed by falling down a shaft in one of his own mines."
- "I should say fate was on her side. How long ago did this take place?"
  - "Almost eighteen months."
  - "Has she children?"
  - "None living."
  - "She has come to New York to live?"
- "She desired some kind of change. She was tired of the West. We may go to Paris, but first she is curious to find out what New York life is like. She is, I am afraid, a woman in quest of sensations."

This seemed to define Mrs. Hernandez to Hartley's perceptions. More than once, as he looked towards her, he had encountered her glance, bent on him and Miss Shepard with a sort of amused curiosity. On leaving the dining-room he at once singled her out, and although she was in conversation with others, he took his stand close beside her and fixed his gaze upon her. His perseverance was rewarded. She soon turned and remarked playfully that he and Eugenia had seemed to find some congenial subject to talk about. Hartley replied that he had been invited to meet herself and had been looking forward all the evening to a chance to speak to her. He seemed inclined to make up for lost time, and succeeded so well in pleasing her that she gave him an eager invitation to come and see her at "The Percy."

He called on the following day, but the ladies were out. The next morning, however, a private messenger brought him an invitation to take a cup of tea with Mrs. Hernandez that day at half past four o'clock. On arriving promptly at that hour, he was ushered into a very luxurious suite of rooms on the second floor of the great hotel, and had time to look about him before his hostess, elaborately dressed, entered, followed by Miss Shepard. She accounted for her delay with a fluency which the visitor now discovered was her habit rather than the comparative languor she had shown at the Roylances' dinner. She explained that she had been waiting for Miss Shepard; it had been stipulated that in coming to the East she should do nothing without a chaperon; she had been used at the West to do much as she took the fancy, -here, she was nothing if not conventional. If she went out to buy a pair of gloves, Miss Shepard must go with her; if she took a drive in the park, Miss Shepard must sit beside her. Hartley hazarded the observation that there might be drawbacks even to the possession of youth and beauty, which Mrs. Hernandez received with some coquetry.

"Eugenia is my angel with the drawn sword," she said with a laugh which showed her small white teeth.

Miss Shepard had not spoken to Hartley except to utter the briefest form of greeting. She looked impatient while this explanation was going on, and, crossing the room to the low table in the corner under the great lamp shaded with a red umbrella, began to make tea.

Hartley tried to give the conversation a more general turn by saying that he had been overprompt, but that in waiting five minutes he had had a chance to observe the prettiness and comfort of the rooms. "They are actually homelike," he said.

Mrs. Hernandez took up the subject with interest. The suite had been furnished in cold pale pink and blue, she said, and she and Eugenia had gone out to the shops and ordered in all sorts of Eastern rugs and embroideries, Japanese screens, jugs and jars, to give a warm effect.

"I need a background," she said. "I like to put on a black or a white gown and leave the room to do the rest."

As she spoke she flung herself against the pile of bright cushions on the low sofa. There was, in

all her movements, in the way she entered and crossed the room, a little more ease and dash than belong, as a rule, to polite society, but she was never awkward or self-conscious. The least vain man in the world must have been flattered by the glance of curiosity and expectation she kept fixed on Hartley.

"How dull that dinner party was," she exclaimed. "At least, what a dull time I had! I thought it would never end. I like to meet new people, but I can tell in five minutes whether they are my kind. Mr. Roylance offered me all the statistics about the Brooklyn churches, gave me the number which belonged to each denomination. When he had exhausted that subject he asked questions concerning the climate and productions of the Pacific coast. I looked over at you and Eugenia with envy, you were so deeply engaged in some topic. Even Mrs. Roylance seemed excited."

"Miss Shepard startled her with some new ideas."

"Did she startle you?"

"I felt that unless I wished to be absolutely convinced and carried over to her views I must shut myself up and try to preserve my balance."

"Do you wish to know what account she gave of you? That you were one of those men so highly polished that nothing makes any impression,—everything slides off. She says you have evidently never thought of women at all

except as pretty ornamental soulless creatures to amuse an idle hour."

"On the contrary, if I could by any sort of antics amuse any one of your sex for one of your idle hours I should be only too proud."

Mrs. Hernandez laughed.

- "I asked her if you were married," she went on.
- "What did she say?"
- "She could not decide. But I see you are not married."
  - "Good heavens, no."
  - "You never have been married?"
- "Most certainly I never have been married. Nobody ever considered me worth having."
- "I suspect it is the other way. You are very fastidious, very ambitious, very"—she made a gesture which seemed to finish the sentence comprehensively without more words. "You go into society a great deal, do you not?" she pursued. "Are you fond of society?"
- "Mr. Hartley may not like to be cross-examined," Miss Shepard struck in with a warning note.
- "But don't you see, Eugenia," pleaded Mrs. Hernandez, "Mr. Hartley is, so to speak, the first human being I have had a chance to get hold of in New York. I came here to be amused, but Mr. Roylance and his set of people do not amuse me. As the Scotchman said, 'They're dool, just dool.' And Eugenia's friends want to talk upon such

abstract subjects. I believe in our having all the rights we want, but I believe in taking them, not in discussing the question of whether it is womanly, whether from the beginning of the universe it was intended we should know when we are cold, when we are hungry, whether we ought to be permitted to cry out if we are hurt. I save time by dismissing those preliminaries," she said, laughing, "and taking what suits me. I am so interested in the life here! I am curious about the people. What I long to hear about, is what New Yorkers can get out of life."

"We generally feel that we are not left behind," observed Hartley.

"Yes, but going into a strange city one is at such a disadvantage. It is like going into one of the grand shops where one is obliged to inquire the price of every individual thing. I have been used to places where anything and everybody had, as it were, a ticket, so I knew exactly what they stood for. If I ask too many questions you must lay it to my zeal for knowledge."

"I will explain," said Hartley, "that I myself am a very costly article; you can hardly put the figures too high."

She regarded him with her brilliant black eyes, evidently not quite sure whether he was ironical or in earnest. Miss Shepard, who had made the tea, now brought him a cup, offering at the same time cream and sugar.

"Give him a slice of lemon and half a wineglass of rum," said Mrs. Hernandez. "I am sure he cares as little as I do about your old maid's brew."

Hartley, however, accepted Miss Shepard's offer.

"Eugenia says that it is the highly civilized thing to have afternoon tea, — that every one expects it now-a-days," pursued Mrs. Hernandez. "I tell her it robs me of all appetite for my dinner."

She took a cup, nevertheless, flavoring it to suit her own taste.

"And give me the bonbons, please, Eugenia," she added; then, when Miss Shepard brought her a box of chocolate comfits, she put them on the low table beside her, told Hartley to take his share without ceremony, and herself began to nibble them with a child's avidity.

"So you are a high-priced article," she said, going back to the subject they had left. "Mr. Roylance told me that you were in the swim, went everywhere in New York — were intimate with all the best people."

"It may be I am invited to more things in a week than I could go to in a month," said Hartley, "but if I were to pose as a man of high social privileges I should consider myself an impostor. I often feel as if these invitations were a mere hollow mockery."

"But why?"

"Because there is nothing solid about my position. I am poor." "You are very frank about it," said Mrs. Hernandez, opening her eyes in astonishment.

"Better to be frank, that people may know where a man stands, and so expect nothing from him and believe nothing in him."

"Oh, I am quite disinterested," she said gayly.

"All I ask for is a chance to spend my own money in my own way on the right sort of people. I have some social ambitions, have I not, Eugenia?"

Although thus pointedly addressed, Miss Shepard made no response except by slightly changing her position as she sat upright in a high-backed chair, gazing straight before her.

"Eugenia is ambitious enough in her own way," said Mrs. Hernandez, with a little grimace. Then, eager to talk about herself, she told Hartley that she had all her life heard about the East and that, meeting Eugenia, and finding that she was anxious to come East, they had come on a voyage of discovery.

"I longed for novelty, — a new world, new people, new occupations which I could test for myself, and I wanted, too, to test myself against something different from what I had known and what had known me all my life. I like the bigness of the West, the horizon, the future of it. So long as you are making money it is the place to live in. When you wish to spend it, luxury seems rather thrown away. And I had been there all my life; I was tired of the West, of the Western railroads, the

Western cities, the Western people, — above all, of the Western point of view."

"And how do you like the Eastern point of view?" asked Hartley.

"I wish you would help me to find out," said Mrs. Hernandez.

He had risen to take leave. He told her he was altogether at her service; and he was sincere, for, in spite of some distaste, he carried away with him a sense of fatality, of irresistible drift towards this new acquaintance.

## CHAPTER VI.

"SHE SHOULD NEVER HAVE LOOKED AT ME IF SHE MEANT I SHOULD NOT LOVE HER."

Constance had made no reply in word to Garthe's explicit statement, but he could see by her play of feature that he had not only startled her, but had roused some conflict of feeling.

"Forgive me if I am too presumptuous," he murmured, looking straight into her eyes.

When she could not meet his glance, could not falter out one syllable, when her only answer was a blush, so vivid and overpowering it showed that some deep emotion was thus translating itself visibly, it is hardly strange that such a response did not repel him.

He could not, however, recapture that moment of magic, when for a moment he had seemed to reach her, to rouse her imagination, to make himself clear. The studio party was over; everybody was hurrying back to town for dinner and evening engagements, and he did not succeed in exchanging another word with Constance. That was a mischance, which some more favorable opportunity would remedy. They dined at the same house together three times within the ensuing week, and

being paired off with others were separated by the length of the table. That also might have been mischance. But when on seeking her directly at home, he found her absent or inaccessible; when within a few feet of each other at a social gathering, he perceived that she permitted anything and everything to push them apart, to hide her from him, he began to see that it was by her own wish, her own will, that they no longer met, and he drew back. Not that he did not experience a pleasurable stimulus in the challenge her whole look, manner, and words had held out. It would have suited his temper to have persisted; he liked to feel his way step by step; he was not made impatient by a necessity for self-restraint; he could have borne denial, since he felt certain of a final victory. Still he drew back. There must be some reason behind her behavior, and the moment he dealt with himself frankly he admitted that there was reason enough. He reviewed the situation; he acknowledged that he had been carried away, that, intoxicated by the present and the promise of the future, he had forgotten his own past. The idea of Constance had refreshed his senses for a day, but it could not be an abiding presence in his life. He was after all the same lonely man he had been, and looking at the matter all round, he could not expect, he could not even hope, to be a different person. He went back to his work, to his books, to his talks and readings with Larry. He renounced daydreams; he

could live without them. His little boy was enough to interest and absorb him. A man with a little child of his own misses nothing; he has a centre for his energies, a constant diversion, an unceasing absorption.

"You seem never to listen to me any more, papa," Larry said once, breaking in upon his reverie. "What is it you are looking at in the fire?"

Garthe knew very well at what mental images he had been gazing. He took the little fellow on his knee, his heart gripped by the thought that he had neglected him lately, left him to the servants: his own child, all that he had in the world or was likely to have!

"Now I will listen, dear," he said. "Tell me everything."

A wave of exultation flushed Larry. He had got his father back again. He felt afresh the comfort of the strong arm; the half-veiled smile of the eyes and lips. His heart swelled with a desire to express something of the thoughts which loomed up before his imagination, but all he could bring to his tongue was everyday babble about Percy Brown, who lived in the next block and went to his school, and who played with him. Percy always managed to get the best of things: the biggest apple; if they played Buffalo Bill and the buffalo, Percy was the former and Larry the latter; at ball, Percy batted and Larry ran after it; if express wagon, Percy was the driver and cracked his whip, and Larry was the horse.

"Is he the best friend you have got?" asked Garthe.

No, there was Frank Benson; he went shares in everything, and Frank had besides a little sister, the most beautiful little girl with the dearest little eyes and lips. Larry liked to go to Frank's house to see her. Frank had a mamma, too. When she heard that Larry had no mamma, she said, "Poor little Larry," and she kissed him twice, and ever since, when she saw him she took him on her lap and kissed him.

- "I pretend," said Larry slyly, "I don't like it. But I do."
- "Should you like to have a mamma?" asked Garthe.
- "No, no, no," Larry shouted. "I've got a papa. I don't want anything more."

One day, in a quiet side street, Garthe came suddenly and unexpectedly upon Constance Garner. For a moment he hesitated, then, baring his head, he stopped directly in her path and looked at her.

She then paused, glanced at him, smiled, and blushed.

- "You never come to us now," she faltered, like the coquette she was with him.
- "Do I not?" he asked, half smiling, looking at her frankly and keenly, and without any selfconsciousness in his manner. "Do you then wish me to come?"
  - "Of course we wish you to come," she murmured,

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her eyes fixing on him, and then withdrawing. "Kathy says —"

"What does she say?" he asked.

"That she never sees you now." Again a blush overmastered Constance, but she persisted. "Will you not come to-morrow?" she asked.

"To-morrow? It is one of your Tuesdays. Of course I shall go gladly since you ask me," said Garthe.

He stood still with his head uncovered while she went up the street. He experienced a strange sensation of relief, a sense of difficulty overcome. He could bear his fate now-a-days without bitter ironies or stern resentments; but it was a fate, nevertheless, and he had accepted the fact logically that it separated him from Constance. Any other solution of the problem her conduct had presented was a mere cobweb which he could brush away.

He had disregarded all his invitations of late which required no direct response, but now he looked them over. If Constance wished to see him, the opportunity was hers. Kathleen, who was hospitably within reach, while Constance was occupied and remote, when he called at the house next day, described him as self-contained in manner. Constance could be eloquent enough in explaining any symptoms of coldness in Garthe. He was no hypocrite, no mere idler; he had occupations; minor considerations perhaps perplexed and hampered him.

The girl, who so far as she understood herself believed that she was sincere, must have needed some mental jugglery in vitalizing the fiction that Garthe's object of pursuit was Kathleen. But then all the world seemed to consider it such a propitious opportunity for a man to fall in love. Mrs. Challoner, who desired nothing so much as that John Marchmont should win Kathleen, still felt that Garthe ought to have his chance.

Garthe was not discontented. It was an easy matter to talk to Kathleen. His interest in Constance made him long to know everything concerning her, and it was something to elicit from her step-mother all sorts of intimate confidences which bore on their everyday pursuits. He could keep in touch with them, could be sure of meeting them.

Then, too, Kathleen's easy volubility entertained him. He considered her a winning creature. With her simple and yet rather subtle witchery, she seemed to him a charming child; offering with a happy and inconsequent flow of ideas the most incredible confessions: what she liked best to eat; her views on the immortality of the soul; her taste in gowns and gloves; her experiences with tight shoes; her impressions upon the question of female suffrage. They soon established the friendliest relations; relations which might easily have seemed to Garthe a happy augury for a better acquaintance with Constance. The camaraderie he and Kathleen had established, he realized on her side as on

his own was purely friendly, utterly devoid of passionate feeling,—she liked somebody to whom she could impart her compunctions for imaginary sins, whom she could impress by her attitude towards the world, running eagerly towards it one week, and the next letting it go by.

"Actually," she said once to Garthe, "I never wish now-a-days to give myself up to enjoyment, but sometimes, as I really love dancing, I get run away with by the music and the little demon within me. Then, too, to dance with the very young men one sees in society seems the easiest way of disposing of them. One gets out of breath and cannot talk, and better still, they get out of breath and cannot talk. I fancy that the reason I like people who are older and wiser than myself is that when a general average is taken between us, I am lifted up; whereas, with the young and foolish, I descend. For although you might not think it, Mr. Garthe, I do have aspirations. Society does not content me, although I love society. What I feel about society is that it stimulates us, offers occupation, gives us a chance of doing something and saying something more than we can in family life. The pleasure of living, I take it, is to feel strongly, and then to utter unreservedly the impression produced upon one. The only trouble is, I am so apt to be unlucky and say something which seems pointed. Now the other night at the private view there was a Mr. Balfour introduced to me at a moment when I was smitten with a desire to talk about the pietures. I remarked that the artists all seemed rather at a loss for a subject, and he said the less subject the better, and quoted Thackeray, who declared an artist needed no head above his eyes. Yes, exactly, I returned, - a painter should be capable of looking at a thing, feeling the whole thrill and passion of it, if it be only a tree, until the actuality of its being a tree burned into his very fibre, -then putting it down simply, - why, that was what I ealled having a subject. 'But now,' I went on, 'look at that picture of nymphs! Certainly the man who painted it had not used his eyes, but had evolved the thing out of his poor little brain above his eyes. He never saw nymphs in a wood, — he never even felt the meaning of nymphs in a wood! Actual nymphs would seem to belong there as much as the trunks of trees or the checker of light and shadow on the moss. These are only girls playing at nymphs whom you long to send to the readymade clothing department at Arnold's, without loss of time, to be fitted out with skirts, blouses, blazers, big sleeves, hats, gloves, and pointed shoes." Kathy paused a second, looked at Garthe, and then, clasping her hands together on her breast, she ejaculated, "Just fancy! This Mr. Balfour was the artist who had painted that picture!"

"Was he hurt by your criticism?" Garthe inquired.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I don't think he liked it," said Kathy sadly.

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"He took me into the next room and showed me some poppies he had done which he fancied might please me better. It reminded me of—

'Bring poppies for the wounded mind.'

A great many poppies are essential in order to induce oblivion after a person talks long with me, I fear. Now, Constance and I were discussing the propriety of widows marrying again; and one day lately, when I was lunching with seven ladies, what she had said on the question occurred to me, and I brought it up. I confess that the subject has two sides, even for me; and sometimes I see it from the point of view that the very fact that a woman has once been happy married ought to induce her to try to be happy again. But on that day I saw it from the other side, and marrying again seemed a sin, and I proclaimed that dogma. I said that no woman who had loved her husband ought to think of marrying again; and if she had not loved him, she was a monster, and no man ought to be permitted to marry her." Kathy looked at Garthe and clasped her hands convulsively at her throat. "And," she went on, "it turned out that of these seven women, three had been married twice, one was a widow for the second time, on the point of making a third marriage, and still another was divorced. I did not mind it so much," Kathy continued naïvely, "where she was concerned, for I particularly dislike the idea of divorced people. And it has to be accepted — taken for granted — that if I am in the room with a divorced person, I shall talk, by irrepressible instinct, about divorces and nothing but divorces, as if my mind were full of the subject. But that is simple justice; don't you think so, Mr. Garthe? Divorces are a horror to me; are n't they to you?"

"A horror," said Garthe. "A living horror, it must be."

"That is just it, — a living horror," said Kathy. "So uncomfortable to have that sort of a ghost. Mr. Marchmont was telling me about being at a men's dinner, where he saw two unhappy-looking individuals sitting in sombre silence looking neither to right nor left, while everybody else was convivial. 'What is the matter with them?' he inquired of somebody. 'Are they mortal enemies?' 'Both married to the same woman, was the reply; and their loss of a pleasing common topic of conversation was explained."

Garthe smiled discreetly; then, putting by the subject, returned to the former one. "Tell me, please, how Miss Garner regards the question of a widow's marrying again."

Kathy suddenly became confused. "Oh, Constance approves of it," she murmured, growing scarlet.

"Very sensibly. I fancy she generally sees a thing simply; has quick decision of mind; is very sincere." "She is very sincere, never tells a fib; yet she never gets into trouble as I do. No dose of poppies is needed after she talks with people. Even my fibs do me no good, — I am always found out," said Kathy sadly.

"I should almost like," said Garthe, "to be able to suspect Miss Garner of insincerity. If she is absolutely truthful, it is painfully clear that she dislikes me. She avoids me, — looks the other way."

"I assure you," said Kathy, laughing, "that there is nobody she likes half so well, approves of half so much; she is always praising you. Sometimes," she added, with irresistible mirth, "I pick all sorts of flaws in you, just to get up an argument." Then, having said so much, Kathy, suddenly abashed, seemed at a loss which way to look. In fact, such an unconquerable fit of shyness had come over her, Garthe needed to have been intensely preoccupied not to be curious to know what had caused it.

What he was busy thinking about, however, was not Kathy at all, but the problem which Constance's whole conduct presented. The most finished coquette could have done no more to stir, charm, and torment, than had she in her advancing, beckoning as it were, then receding, almost vanishing. What had originally been a mere impulse to test himself, to assert his own right to the simple, everyday pleasures which belong to every

man, now became a passionate wish, somehow, to reach this girl, this girl with her clear, luminous face full of feeling and loyalty, like a brave, honest child's, and find out the secret of her enigmatical behavior.

His utter forgetfulness of everything except this wish to reach her was something incredible, when one considered his state of mind a month or two before. He, the most silent of men, found himself talking at a dinner-table in a way to insure her giving him a glance. He had had a different life from other men, and could touch many subjects generally left untouched, and that, too, with a freshness and fullness of meaning which commanded attention. When the light of her glance had once flashed through him, he was willing to be silent the rest of the evening; the glow and fire of her dark eyes stayed with him, warmed him, comforted him. Again, he used contrivance to force her to shake hands with him, when he could detect a little trembling in her fingers. More than once, in the way she bit her lips and smiled resolutely when thus brought to bay, there was something which stirred his whole nature almost fiercely. In fact, in all these challenges flung down by her reserve, there was everything to rouse the resolution and the passionate will of a man like Garthe who, when once moved, was nothing less than ardent. Thus, his thoughts revolving around and around Constance, - her look, her manner, the least detail of her behavior, the words she had spoken that day in the street, and those she had left unsaid,—he had no time for introspection, for groping after his own motives, for questionings of his own position.

Thus it fell out that after wishing for weeks that he could ask her to deal with him frankly, the opportunity came, and with his quick practical sense of this being his one chance, he seized it.

He had heard from Kathleen that she and Constance were going to the opera with Mrs. Challoner that evening, and in the way he did everything now-a-days without stopping to decide what must be the result of this pursuit, he set out for the opera-house as soon as Larry was asleep. He was conscious, as he was always conscious now in looking forward to a chance of meeting Constance, of a heightened state of nervous tension, of a joyous fever like that he had sometimes felt when on the verge of some discovery or invention.

Just as he was about to enter the opera-house he encountered John Marchmont, and they shook hands. Garthe, preoccupied although he was, was conscious of a slight constraint in the manner of the older man. Something had seemed to flash into his eyes the moment they fell on Garthe.

"I suppose you are going to join Mrs. Challoner's party," he said.

"Mrs. Challoner did not invite me," Garthe answered. "I may look in; Mrs. Garner and her daughter are with her, I suppose."

"I have just left Constance sitting alone at home," said John Marchmont. "She did not feel quite well; did not come out; I dined with her."

"Is she ill?" demanded Garthe. "Too ill to see a visitor?"

"She has a slight cold. I left her sitting before the fire not ten minutes ago," said Mr. Marchmont. A load seemed taken off him; he smiled at Garthe, observing with relief this instant bound in a new direction.

"I wish to ask Miss Garner a question," the young man said with quick decision. "I will try at all events to find her." He was off in a flash.

"Miss Garner is at home?" he said to the servant who opened the door of the house on Lexington Avenue. He did not wait to be announced. He was conscious not only of a clear purpose, but of a vehemence which made it an imperious need to act upon his purpose. He threw off his outside garment and walked straight into the drawing-room where Constance sat before the fire, holding a book in her hand, but not at the moment reading. She heard footsteps, looked up, and saw Garthe.

He had gained her side and stood looking down with a serious, unfaltering look.

"Mr. Marchmont told me you were at home," he said. "I ventured to come. I had a particular wish to see you."

She had not risen. There was no reason why she should rise, but she was conscious of her powerlessness. She was startled by his advent, and showed it. She could not regain her self-command, but sat feeling helpless. He took her hand and looked into her face.

- "I hope you are not too ill to receive me," he said.
- "No, not ill. Perhaps a little feverish. I caught at an excuse for not going out."
- "I have wished for weeks to ask you a question," he said, not yet releasing her hand.
- "Sit down, will you not?" she murmured at last, drawing it away, "I am sorry that"
  - "Sorry that I came?"
- "No, we are always glad to see you. I am sorry that Kathy is away."

He smiled. "I knew that she was at the opera. I heard that you were here alone."

- "Kathy" she began, but he interrupted.
- "Miss Garner, with every one else you are a truthful and candid person. I beseech you to deal simply with me to-night. I must know how I stand with you."

He could see the trouble in her face as his eyes held hers. He went on:—

"First, — do you remember what I said that day at Mr. Marchmont's?"

She drew a deep breath as if stifled. "Remember it? Oh, yes, I remember it very well."

- "Did I offend you?"
- "Offend me?"

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- "Yes, did I offend you?"
- "I have tried to forget it," she murmured.
- " Why?"

She looked at him appealingly, then withdrew her glance.

- "I cannot think why you should ask me such a question," she said proudly. "If it had to be forgotten, it had to be forgotten."
- "But why forgotten? Did it displease your taste, your conventional sense, or your conscience? Did it shock, repel, vex you?"

She did not answer.

"I have said to myself since," Garthe went on, "when I found you withdrawn from me, that I had overstepped my bounds. Perhaps you will remember that I dropped out of your sight, that I went back to the poor fragment of a life I have outside of that to which you belong. But one day when I encountered you, you said to me 'come,' and I came."

She shrank a little. "I ought not to have said it," she said, as if pierced with remorse.

- "Because you were not sincere?"
- "Oh yes, I was sincere."
- "Sincere in wishing me to come, or in liking me?"
  - "Sincere in wishing you to come."
  - "You do not like me, then," he exclaimed.
- "I did not say that," she returned, so quickly it seemed to be a point of conscience.

"But you have been less - kind. You told me to come again. I came, of course. I had, in coming again, no right to count on your favor. It would be absurd self-conceit in me to complain that you have avoided me. That you ever seemed not to avoid me was, I suppose, merely your generosity. That you ever seemed to encourage me, to draw me on, was, no doubt, because you discovered in me a critically apathetic state of mind, which, as a sweet woman, you longed to cure. And you have cured it. Instead of being dull, callous, dumb, under blows, I have waked up. I have ventured to see and feel, almost to hope. Especially that day at Mr. Marchmont's I was happy and alive. The thought of you sitting in the alcove with the sunset light on your face has come up to me again and again. If I were to live a hundred years I should never have again just such an experience; it is a recollection apart from anything else, held sacred, everlastingly renewed. And, Miss Garner, I could have sworn that day you did not dislike me."

She lifted her eyes, then dropped them. "Oh, Mr. Garthe," she said restlessly.

"I am unmanly in thus pressing you to the wall; still I am most a man in saying that I must know just how and why I displeased you. If you dislike me I will go away instantly,—you need never think of me again."

Her proud young face was something to watch

as she tried in vain to raise her eyes. Her under lip quivered.

- "Shall I go away?" he demanded.
- "Of course I do not wish you to go away," she said simply. "Kathy and I have enjoyed your acquaintance extremely."
- "You! When you have avoided me! When you have tolerated any man, any woman, an album of pietures, a screen of plants, anything, to keep me at a distance!" he returned. "Do not, I beg of you, swerve away from my direct question. It means so much to me. Shall I go away?"

He bent down and tried to read the expression of her face. He took her hands in one of his and brought down the other upon them.

- "Speak," he said softly. "Am I to go away?"
- "No," she whispered.
- "Oh, thank you, thank you."
- "But" she began, restless under this fervor, trying to draw her hands from him.
  - "But what?"
- "I am not thinking about myself in this matter. I must make you realize that I am not thinking about myself."
- "I only ask that you shall think a little of me," said Garthe, smiling. "It is only fair. I myself have done nothing of late except to think of you."

She raised her eyes and met his. He saw the play of a dimple on her cheek, as if suddenly reassured.

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"Please do not," she said lightly, yet implor-

ingly.

But his look, the pressure of his hand, overwhelmed her anew. Indeed, his whole face was transfigured with feeling. What had originally sprung from an impulse merely to understand the situation had become an overmastering instinct to push the situation to its limit.

- "Please do not what?" he asked.
- "Please do not think of me."
- "Do not ask the impossible. Trust me. Dearest, you may trust me. I am to be trusted."
  - "Then please let go my hand."
  - "Do you not trust me?"
  - "Oh yes, I trust you."

He released her hand, but her exquisite blush—the beautiful soft mildness of her eyes—made his heart swell with the sweetest hope he had ever felt. He watched her face as he went on speaking rapidly.

- "Yes, you are safe in trusting me. I will claim nothing. There is much, however, that I long to understand. At first you made me welcome here,—then you put barriers between yourself and me. Has any one been influencing you against me?"
  - "No, no. Do not think of such a thing."
  - "Yet you changed."

Again she suffered before his eyes. He studied her face as he studied a page of problems, with a knitted brow. He forced himself to review the history of their acquaintance. His insight was swifter than his logic. With a single leap he reached the truth.

"Understand me once for all, Constance," he said in a soft, clear voice. "It is just as I told you that day, it is you and no other. No other woman exists for me."

"Then I have done very wrong," she said with a piteous glance and tone. "I have made a wicked mistake."

"Dear, I have had one single feeling,— that you are such a woman as I had never yet dreamed of. I have had no choice but to act on the impulse which drew me to you. I do not know how to pretend. I had no reason for pretending."

"I cannot endure to have you tell me such things. You ought not to flatter me. I am very unhappy."

She was pale and looked at him anxiously. He had drawn a chair close to her, and at last sat down facing her.

"I am sorry to have you unhappy," he said, leaning nearer. "But if you are unhappy about me there is some consolation in that."

"It is something quite different," said Constance, almost with indignation. "How can you jest on such a subject?"

"Jest? If you knew my heart, — how I long to fall at your feet, — how sweet it is to be here, yet how little I dare say what I feel!"

She extended her hand with a little gesture; he caught it and clasped it passionately.

"Oh, I did not mean that," she said hastily.

"I take anything you give me. I am the merest beggar."

Again the dimple played on her cheek. Let her try as she might to control the situation, it controlled her. In spite of all her resolution, all her will, all her wish, he disarmed her pride, quieted her alarm.

"I want you to forget all that you have said," she now ventured with a humble glance.

"But I have not begun to say it. I am dying to say that — I love you, love you, love you."

"But please, Mr. Garthe, I ask you to go back and forget all that, to make a fresh start. If you really care for me"—

" If I really care for you!"

"Then," she said softly, "you will do what I ask,—you will go back and make a new beginning."

He looked at her intently. He did not catch her meaning.

- "There is no possible step backward in life. You cannot put back the full leaf into the bud."
- "But you must see things from my point of view."
  - "I will try to do so, on one condition."
  - "What is that?"
- "That you will remember that I love you,—that I desire above every earthly thing to have you for

my wife. You will not forget that, my dearest one?"

"How can I forget it?" she said rather sadly under her breath. Their eyes had met for a moment. He was beloved,—he knew that he was beloved.

"Now tell me just where the difficulty comes in," he said.

But she shivered. It was not easy to summon cold logic under the fire of his eyes.

"Suppose," he said quietly, "I were to hazard a bold guess. You desire everything for Kathy. Let me call her Kathy, for I love her for her own sake and for yours. You desire everything for her, — above all a happy second marriage. You feel that for you to accept love, companionship, anything personal and precious to yourself, and leave her lonely and unmated, seems selfish and cruel."

She looked at him with wonder, exclaiming: —

"Are you a wizard, to read my thoughts?"

"I am a wizard. See that you have no thoughts I may not read." He smiled. "Here is another bold guess. When you saw me, you said to yourself, 'Perhaps this man may do for Kathy.'"

"Surely it was very natural. You were young —"

"Go on."

"We heard good things of you. Kathy was attracted by you; I — trusted you on the instant."

"You can't begin to think how it flatters me that you should consider me half good enough for Kathy," said Garthe, laughing slightly. "I know you would not egoistically insist upon having something better than you designed for her. I venture to infer that"—

A look of pain had come over her face. "I am not thinking of myself. I do not dare think of myself."

- "Not yet," he answered. "First, we are to provide a happy future for Kathy. But I see one all ready for her. There is a man ready and eager to take the responsibility off our hands."
  - "Not Mr. Hartley!"
- "Certainly not Hartley. Quite a different man."
  - "I cannot think whom you mean."
  - "John Marchmont."
- "But he was papa's friend," cried Constance, aghast. "We have known him always. He regards us both as daughters."
- "He may regard you as a daughter; certainly he has no such feeling towards Kathy."
  - "You must be mistaken."
  - "No, I am not mistaken."

She drew a long breath. "But Kathy is not in love with Mr. Marchmont," she said in a tone of distress, as if Kathy were in love with somebody else.

"Don't do her that injustice," said Garthe,

almost with vehemence, answering not her words, but the meaning behind her words. "It is not true. I warn you not to believe it. How dare you?" he said, bending towards her. "I say, how dare you give her to the man who loves you?"

"But I want her to be happy," faltered Constance, with a quivering lip. "If you—could—love—her—I should rejoice—I—"

He knitted his brow and looked at her almost in anger. Then his face cleared and he laughed.

"What would you do? Marry John Marchmont?"

"I have never thought of marrying. I have never had any wish to marry. With Kathy happy"—

"She will be happy with John Marchmont," said Garthe. "Look at me, Constance." He laid his hand on hers as he met her eyes. "I could not make her happy," he said quietly. "She is not a woman I could rest upon, and believe in, and satisfy. But I feel, dear, that if you would first love me, — then forgive me certain things, I might make you very happy."

She did not answer except with a soft little sigh, which was, he knew, for Kathy.

"What makes you think Mr. Marchmont cares for her?" she finally asked, breaking the silence.

"Something in the way he watches me; in the relief he showed to-night when I spoke of coming to see you; in a hundred different things. Do

you recall how, the first night I dined here, I picked up a slipper, — an adorable little slipper?"

"You picked it up? I thought it was Mr.

Marchmont."

"It was I, but the moment his eye fell on it he was in a fever. That Hartley or I should touch, even look at the holy thing, was profanation. He stole it from under my very eyes. I confess I always wondered what the sequel was."

He looked at her, wondering to see her quite downcast.

"Poor Kathy," she sighed. "I do wish, I cannot help wishing that"—

He laid his hand against her lips. "Don't say it," he murmured. "You are sure to repent it. Some day you will be wiser. Evidently, you do not know what it is for a man to be in love, not to say a woman."

His words and manner drove their significance to her heart.

"I treat you badly," she faltered.

"Treat me as badly as you like, so long as you feel that our fates are intervolved, — that we are one in desiring the very best that can happen to Kathy."

There was a secret intoxication for him in the conviction that she was holding to the letter of the law which bade her give up everything dear to her step-mother, but that in spite of duty of conscience, she was already half conquered. In her

indecision, in her abnegation of self, she was almost more seductive than she could have been if she had instantly accorded all he asked for. The clear evidence that the idea of having a lover of her own was novel, startling, almost displeasing, bewitched his sense.

For the moment he said no more to rouse conflict in her mind. Dismissing fervor, he began to talk of general subjects, showing her that even as a lover he could be calm and self-contained. It seemed, too, to show his generosity that he had not been wounded by her lack of response. A little worn and weary, she had sometimes longed for a strong directing hand, a mind answering hers with instant comprehension; but she had not expected it. For herself, let the worst happen if only Kathy might escape the sordid ills of life; that had been her unhesitating thought. Now as Garthe talked she saw his clear-cut face, his vivid glance, with a new sense of pleasure and of relief. The reality of his position towards her, contrasting with the decorous flow of conversation, deepened the meaning of his words and kindled almost a romantie feeling.

The clock chimed, and all at once she started.

- "What is it?" he demanded.
- " She will be coming home."
- "Kathy? You prefer she should not find me here?"

She nodded. Both had risen. Their eyes met,

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not casually, but with the sense of a supreme moment.

"I will go at once," he said. She extended timidly a fair, white hand. "Is it mine?" he asked, raising it and bending as if to put his lips to it.

"No, no, no," she cried; "not to-night."

"Not to-night," he repeated, "but —"

He saw that she pulsed with eagerness to have him go away. He knew her motive, and it vindicated her coldness. He did not linger. When he was in the street, he found himself excited to feverheat. He had been aware that while talking to Constance, a gayety, long unknown to his habit but still unexhausted in his nature, had almost caught him up and carried him away; but not until this moment did he realize the intensity of his exultation over his achievement. He himself had not foreseen just how far the logic of the situation was to compel him. But she loved him. He thought over each detail of the three hours he had spent with her. He would have had nothing different. Again and again he repeated her last words, "No, no, no, not to-night," feeling that their meaning was not denial, but surrender. How sweet, how naïve, how good she was! While he talked to her he had been conscious of her keen intelligence, besides her sympathy; not that of a mere clever woman whose object is to bring out what is in a man in order to display her own wit and assimilate

his knowledge, but that of a loving heart which penetrates, divines, and feels.

His brain was thrilled, his heart was warmed, his whole nature kindled by a sense of this higher life, this swifter stirring of the intellect and pulses she could give him. He began to feel a rebellious longing for the kiss she had made him forego. He wanted her tangibly, palpably, here at his side. How little he had said, after all, — not a word of his perpetual thought of her, his loneliness without her, — the cry of his soul for her soul. He almost dreaded to go home and meet the midnight hush in his house; the soft hiss of the burning fire; the lamp lighted and shaded for reading; the sense of little Larry upstairs asleep; the solitude below, with its terrible need of a presence which rested, soothed, sustained.

With this thought, a significant bubble broke up from the deeps of his passionate reverie. He stopped short in the street. He had suddenly realized that this fervor of feeling he had expended and was expending must be paid for. He, of all men, could least afford to give up his adherence to cool and candid reason.

He had halted opposite an open square. The night was foggy; the electric lights gave strange effects to the vapors out of which steeples, roofs, towers, and statues loomed up tremendously magnified. Some of the buildings looked like giants with burning eyes; the commonest sight seemed weird

and fantastic. Garthe, at this moment of reaction from a great happiness into a sombre mood, saw something almost threatening in this strange aspect of things: in the intensely luminous light which was not light, contrasting with the darkness which was not so much darkness as a yawning gulf of blackness invading the province of the light. above glimmered a wan moon, showing to-night no white fire to consume the smouldering residue of spent cloud, but focusing its pallid image at the end of a long shining tunnel of fog. A ghostly night, - a night to give the lie to hope; to annihilate at a breath color, warmth, passion. In spite of sounds from the streets, from the elevated railways, which told that the stir, the life, the movement of the city were not all at an end, it was a night to inspire the belief that everything was dead.

While Garthe stood, undecided whether to go home or whether to continue his walk, all at once, out of a confused group of figures at the corner, one separated itself and approached him.

"I thought it was you, Lawrence," said Ferdinand Hartley's cheery voice. "What are you doing here at midnight?"

"I am on my way home," said Garthe. "I stopped for a moment to look at the fog,—it moves across the square like an army of ghosts."

"Beastly night," said Hartley. "I advise you not to stand too long and let the dampness penetrate your vitals."

- " Are you going to your room?"
- "Yes. Come on with me."
- "I'll walk with you as far as your door. I have n't seen you lately."
- "Nor I you. But then, I have dropped all my old friends," said Hartley, with a sort of chuckle.
  - "Something more interesting?"
- "Something more engrossing. Oh, by the way, Lawrence, you know Montana, — did you ever happen to hear of a man by the name of Aurelio Hernandez?"
- "Yes; a little dried-up Mexican, and as bad as they make them, which is, I assure you, pretty bad."
  - " Rich?"
- "Said to be very rich. He had swindled twenty better men out of their claims and had got almost complete possession of two mines. Besides, he owned more than one ranch, and controlled large interests in half a dozen different directions."
  - "Did you ever happen to see his wife?"
  - "I never heard that he had a wife."
  - "Are you sure?"
- "He might have been married all the time. Why do you ask? The man is dead; I saw some time ago he was killed by falling down a shaft."
- "That was true, then!" said Hartley, in a tone as if of relief.

Garthe looked at Hartley.

"Why are you interested in that old miser?" he inquired.

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- "I know his widow," said Hartley significantly.
  "I have just come from the Percy, where she is spending the winter."
  - "Is she the new and engrossing acquaintance?"
  - "She is."
  - "What kind of a woman?"
- "Quite unexceptionable; unimpeachable credit; brings letters; has a companion who never leaves her alone"—
- "Rich, I take it, if she comes in for Hernandez's money," said Garthe dryly.
- "Everything seems irresistibly to point to that conclusion," answered Hartley lightly. "I'm not wholly disinterested. You know my necessities; indeed, who should know them better? I have but one ambition; that is, to see my way clear to the possession of some of the elegancies and refinements of life. I should like to have no sordid considerations. I should prefer to be able myself to offer the woman I love all the luxuries which wealth can give. Failing this, why should not the woman who loves me offer me all the riches her late husband left her?"
- "Do you mean that you are trying to marry this widow of old Hernandez?"
  - "Why not, if I can?"
  - "How old is she?"
- "She is young; that is, young enough, and handsome, — splendid dark hair and eyes, rich bloom, Southern blood in her veins. I wish you would go with me, some evening, to see her."

"Thank you very much, but I should be in the way."

"Not at all, and as you both know the West"-

"I hate the West," cried Garthe with sudden angry scorn. "I hate every suggestion of the life there. If I had my choice, I would never meet anybody who had crossed the Mississippi. I say to myself, the old life at the West is over, it is finished, it is dead, — I have no longer any part in it, or it in me! I hate the very ghost of it."

"Mrs. Hernandez is not much fonder of her experience there than you seem to be," said Hartley, laughing.

"Let me see; you say she is dark-haired, dark-eved?"

"Yes. You recall her?" demanded Hartley eagerly.

"Oh, no. I simply asked. She is really hand-some?"

"At times quite superb,—overdresses a little, but still gets herself up effectively. She is amusing, naïve as a child, and says with singular frankness everything that comes into her head,—partly in order to shock her duenna, perhaps."

"The Spaniards have a proverb, 'Who says all soon arrives at all.'"

"She is discreet, even if not quite conventional. Many a woman in the best society does things more out of taste. She means to improve, and will improve. I wish you would come with me to see her."

- "No, thank you, and don't mention me to her."
  "Why not?"
- "I didn't like the late Hernandez, although he once paid me the compliment of offering me five hundred dollars a month; then, when I declined, was willing to double the sum. I told him frankly I would not, at any price, have anything to do with him, that I detested him."

"Oh, I see; you think she will bear you a grudge," said Hartley. They had reached his place. "Will you come in?" he asked.

Garthe said it was time to go home. They shook hands and parted. Their talk had not lasted ten minutes, but the experience had seemed strangely to separate Garthe from his former mood, and the gap and chasm did not fill up.

He tried to bring back the image of Constance, close beside him, her hand in his own; her face instinct with feeling; her lovely eyes, opening full on his for a moment, then dropping their lids,—but something interposed with warning finger. He suddenly saw his conduct in a different light. Had he gone to her that night with deliberation, he must have felt that he had no right to say to her, "Be my wife," without first enlightening her fully upon every point of his own history. For a moment he was ready to regard himself as a vulgar schemer who, to compass his ends, resorts to any sort of machinations. The very belief in his trustworthiness which he had imposed upon her, as if he had

a right to be a second conscience in which she could find her best courage and her best strength, was now a recollection to rouse scruples, to stir remorse. He had acted as if there were no such things as scruples, as if there were only events; as if laws, moral and social, did not exist, and as if a man were necessarily the slave of circumstances. He had, indeed, acted in a way in which it seemed inconceivable he should have acted. He had not even made allusion to his marriage, to his boy Larry, the lonely little fellow into whose life she would bring as much joy as into his own.

A cold fear erept about his heart; the old trouble revived, the dread of daring to hope anything, count on anything; the old sense of defeat and humiliation, which made him feel like clasping Larry in his arms, and going to hide himself and him in some strange land, as if they were both irremediably sullied and tainted. How had he dared to take life simply, as if he possessed the same right as other men to claim what he aspired to! He halted again in the lonely street, and looked up at the cloudy sky, where the moon showed only the centre of a luminous space, which formed a bright sphere above the depths of gloom.

"She is as much separated from me and my destiny," he said audibly, "as that light from this darkness,—as that heaven from this hell."

Then even as he gazed up, feeling defiant, proud, unutterably wretched at heart, wishing that he

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might die and suffer no more, all at once the clouds, torn across by a sudden gust, parted, and the moon shone out unobscured; while, still clearing away the murky vapors, the wind went on, and opening vistas into the dark blue vault disclosed the Pleiades, Orion, the Great Bear, and the whole shining galaxy.

The sight, even if it did not brighten Garthe, sustained him. If Constance loved him, - and he believed she loved him already a little, and would love him more, - she would look unflinchingly into his past, understand it and him in it, with absolute acceptance, with absolute sympathy. There could be no use in his despair, in his disgust, in his rage against his fate. Long ago he had shed all his tears, exhausted all his surprise that that bitter, that accursed taint should have come upon his life. What he had had to do, what he still had to do, was to keep from despair, from murmuring, from cavil and doubt of the worth of anything in God's universe; to go on as a man should go on, testing his own sincerity, accepting nothing from happy chance, from trick or effort to shape events to his own ends.

### CHAPTER VII.

#### BELLA AND EUGENIA.

GARTHE, in their brief interview, had observed that Ferdinand Hartley's old blitheness of heart had returned. In fact, what Mrs. Hernandez's admirer experienced now-a-days was a subtle sense of humor in the situation, besides the satisfaction of knowing he was a bold man hazarding an experiment. Hitherto anything outside his own set had been outside the world; not to know certain people, not to be included in certain coteries, was not to exist. Now his mind was expanded for a larger view of things. This paltry world of New York, in which he had hitherto lived, moved, and had his being, had done little or nothing for him. There were new worlds to conquer; with plenty of money one might live well in London, in Paris, even in Japan. There is a foolish and cowardly fastidiousness which narrows a man and limits his chances; he would have no more of it. His scheme was to make himself indispensable to Mrs. Hernandez, not to increase her knowledge of the world in a way to lessen her need of him; rather to centre and concentrate her belief in her dependence upon him; in short, to become her husband.

She was rarely out of his thoughts. Standing at the window of his club and watching women go by, he compared them with her, not unfrequently to her advantage and their disadvantage. She often disappointed him, often shocked him when he was prepared to admire; still she had a style of her own which was effective, often rather diabolically effective. Of course, a man must stand in his position in order to distinguish certain flaws in her as jealously as Hartley was obliged to do. He had speculated a good deal as to whether she could not be induced to subdue herself to the general tone and color of society; and it was probably when he despaired a little of her reaching a fuller apprehension of certain niceties that he was ready to congratulate himself that there existed outside this paltry little New York world the larger world of Paris, London, or Japan, as a more liberal school of manners. For although he flattered himself upon his influence over Mrs. Hernandez, or Bella, as he began to call her to himself, there was at times an unexpected quality about her which made him feel doubts whether he perfectly understood the mainspring of the mechanism. Not even Miss Shepard could invariably control it; although at the first sign of exuberance, not to say boisterousness, she showed a frown between her brows and a sparkle in her yellow eyes which betokened disapprobation. "Yet," Hartley pondered, "just give Bella an assured position and her motto of 'Je suis

ce que je suis, so take me as I am and make the best of me,' would be in her favor. Such women rule the world just because they love sensation, enjoy their own success, and make the most of it."

But an assured position is not to be picked up at the first corner, and, meanwhile, Hartley and the Roylances contrived amusements for the rich and pretty widow, who, so long as she was not left without homage and without entertainment, preferred to pause a little on the brink and not make a plunge to gain the mid-current. She liked, she said, to look on; to study out clews, to speculate, to ask questions. Indeed, Hartley sometimes suspected her of tremors. She was interested in her business affairs, spent much time with her lawyer, and liked to understand the ins and outs of the least negotiation; and with these occupations and with somebody to turn to, to listen, flatter, and applaud, she seemed quite contented with the superficial character of her social diversions. There was probably excitement of a high degree simply in the ordering and wearing of her gowns. She made a weekly dinner for the Roylances and for some of Miss Shepard's friends, accepted a few invitations from them, attended lectures and meetings occasionally when Eugenia spoke or coöperated with others; but it was clear to Hartley that what she really looked forward to and depended on was his own frequent visits: with him her vitality was always aglow, her inquisitiveness always alert, her desire for an audience gratified.

One evening in January, when he had been invited to dinner, he found, to his satisfaction, on arriving, that he was the only guest.

"I am tired of all the other people I know," Mrs. Hernandez said frankly, as she shook hands with him. "I hope you are not disappointed, but you will see no one except Eugenia and me."

Hartley, who could say such things as well as most men, expressed his pleasure that there was no party.

"They say," continued Mrs. Hernandez, "that two are company and three are a crowd; but Eugenia and I are to all intents and purposes one, —body and soul you might call us."

"I quite disclaim the idea of being merged in any other person's identity," said Miss Shepard. "Whatever I am, I am Eugenia Shepard; whatever faults or virtues I possess, they are my own."

"She wishes not to be responsible for mine," said Mrs. Hernandez gayly. "But all the same she is my conscience-keeper."

"The keeper of your conscience has no very heavy burden to carry," said Miss Shepard with her grim smile.

These railleries were not without charm for Hartley, showing as they did a good understanding between the two women. For, let him admire Mrs. Hernandez as he might, it was Miss Shepard in whom he actually trusted and believed, whose mental stability gave worth to Mrs. Hernandez's money,

whose seriousness gave substance to her levity, whose altruism balanced her self-love.

Mrs. Hernandez's good looks were set off tonight with peculiar piquaney by an airy black gown sparkling with jet. Round neck and wrists she wore chains of Indian gold with filigree pendants, and in her curls and braids were pins of the same beautifully worked metal. She had, perhaps, rather a savage taste for ornaments, Hartley, habitually critical, said to himself, but they became her. She possessed a style of her own, and what her actual beauty did not effect a certain verve and vitality easily could. Then, too, when a woman is pretty, the fact that she is, besides, a rich woman gives the least of her attractions a point and an edge.

"Let us have dinner at once," said Mrs. Hernandez to the man in attendance. He drew back the curtains and disclosed a beautiful little table in the alcove, all silver and crystal, with a great bowl of Catherine Mermet roses in the centre. They went out together, and the servant drew the chair opposite the hostess for the guest; but, as if he did not observe it, Hartley took a place at his hostess's right hand.

"Ah," she said, looking at him with her sparkling ironical glance, "you decline to take the foot of the table."

"Great as is my ambition," replied Hartley, "I am still too modest to take such a place unless it fairly belongs to me."

"Is it that you are modest," she retorted, "or that your motto is 'All or nothing'?"

"You define it exactly," said Hartley, turning his laughing blue eyes full upon her. "I will have all or nothing."

"Just as well to leave the place empty," said Mrs. Hernandez laughing. "It leaves something to the imagination."

"Let us trust that no ghost of Banquo will rise to fill it," said Hartley idly, simply to carry on the jest. Rather to his dismay, at his words Mrs. Hernandez gave a visible shudder, and said hurriedly to the servant,—

"Take the things away,—the chair, and the glasses, and knives, and forks. I have the most childish horror of ghosts," she added, with another shiver, glancing first at one and then at the other of her companions.

"So have I," said Hartley soothingly. He was conscious not only of his own awkwardness, but of the singularity of her minding such a hackneyed allusion. To change the subject, he began talking at once about a great ball which they had attended the night before. Mrs. Hernandez had taken a box. He had spent some time with her and Miss Shepard, pointing out certain notable people, and afterwards they had watched him as he joined one group after another in the circle or on the floor.

"I felt very much flattered that, with so many friends, you had wasted any time on poor, insignificant me," observed Mrs. Hernandez. "That was the only part of the evening I enjoyed," said Hartley.

"But so many beautiful ladies, so many charming girls!"

"Reflect that I am an old stager; that I entered society eight or nine years ago; that all my set were long since married off; that the new ones are made up of boys and girls I have patted on the head, and who regard me as an antique, — something left over from the last century. I cannot dance to their piping."

"To whose, then?" Mrs. Hernandez asked coquettishly.

"If I am ambitious, I had better conceal the height and breadth of my ambition."

Her eyes sparkled. "I like to think you are ambitious. One has to be ambitious in this world!" she exclaimed eagerly. "One has to take one's life in both hands and squeeze what one wants out of it as if it were an orange."

"Then throw the rind away," suggested Miss Shepard.

"If one can," said Mrs. Hernandez, with a little sigh. "I often exult over my success, but it is a little bit spoiled. Eugenia is the really lucky woman. What I wanted was money, luxury, everybody's admiration. Now, in the very nature of things, I find all sorts of obstacles in my way. What I want depends on other people; on my being young, in good health, and above all good spir-

its. The moment I am sick or sorry, everything I have is detestable to me. But Eugenia has never asked for anything except to understand things all through and deep down. She does not want people to admire *her*, to flatter *her*; she does not crave wealth, authority, social preëminence. She simply wants "—

"I am very anxious to make money," interrupted Eugenia sharply.

"To send to her relations, to do good with. She doesn't care about gowns, silk stockings, gold chains, and brooches," Mrs. Hernandez went on, in the highest spirits. "Often, when we are out, I tell her to buy anything she takes a fancy to, and that I will settle the bill; but if she condescends to accept my offer, it is to get hold of something strong, durable, ugly."

"Well, tastes differ," said Eugenia.

"That is true. Tastes do differ extraordinarily. I sometimes doubt, Mr. Hartley, whether Eugenia and I actually belong to the same species; but perhaps it is only a difference in taste. She enjoys women's meetings, women's clubs, women's classes. She likes to discuss grievances against husbands, against employers, against servants, against everything moral and religious; for everybody has some sure way to urge of reforming husbands and other evils, — divorce, suffrage, coöperation, socialism, hypnotism, spiritualism, or Buddhism."

"She is as much fascinated by it all as I am," said Eugenia to Hartley.

"I go along with her, it is true," Mrs. Hernandez explained. "I like to see the different women. I study them, and I listen, and am sometimes interested and sometimes amused. Often, too, I am bored, bored to death. You see, I have had my grievances in my time, and I know the fallacy of their ready-made remedies."

"I do not see any reason for your finding fault with the universe," said Hartley. "With all respect for Miss Shepard's views, I think women most admirable when they do not air their grievances."

"So long as I am young, rich, and have new gowns, I intend to redress mine without talking too much about them," said Mrs. Hernandez gayly. She stopped, and looked at her guest. "Are you enjoying your dinner?" she inquired.

"An excellent dinner so far."

"We are ladies, and our tastes may not please you. Order anything you may happen to prefer."

"A capital dinner," said Hartley again. "I ask no better."

"They like me downstairs," she went on. "They are anxious to please me. Eugenia says that my idea of what is good is whatever is most expensive. I am a favorite with everybody who has anything to sell. The shop-people adore me. I do not haggle. I do not turn over all the goods on the counter without buying, and promise to call another time. I simply say, 'Show me the best you have;'

then, if it is handsome enough, I say, 'Send it to the Percy.'"

"Most probably," said Eugenia unfalteringly, "they laugh in their sleeve at you. They see at a glance that you have no experience, no nice choice, no nice discrimination; that you simply have money to fling about. They say to each other that you must have a gold mine behind you, and you will soon be at the end of it."

"Luckily I have got a gold mine behind me," said Mrs. Hernandez, meeting Miss Shepard's strictures with absolute good-nature. "I have no objection to being thought rich. Money is the universal touchstone. Everybody loves it and desires it above all things." She turned to the man behind her chair. "Just give me the salver on the little table by the door," she said; and when he brought it, she made a motion directing him to put it beside Hartley. "There!" she exclaimed, in triumph. "I sent a check for a hundred dollars to each of three charities, and all these people have been to see me."

Hartley turned over the cards. Mrs. Challoner's was among them.

"They are excellent names," he said thoughtfully.

"All the same, it is an expensive way of getting into society," remarked Eugenia.

"This is a give-and-take world," replied Hartley.

"I am not easily deluded," said Mrs. Hernan-

dez. "If I give money you may be sure always that I intend to get money's worth. If these people expect more checks they must pay me attentions, invite me to their houses, make much of me. I accept whatever furthers my desire to get on in the world; not that I care particularly about it except to show those who have tried to keep me down that I am at the very top. I might for a while enjoy making all the men in love with me and all the women wild with envy, but I should soon be ready to snap my fingers at the whole crowd and let them know my opinion of them."

Hartley, startled, rather disenchanted, dropped his eyes and seemed to be musing in silence.

"That is like a silly child," said Eugenia, "who desires a costly plaything in order to tear it to pieces. In such a position your aim should be to show that you had advanced not by the mere brutal supremacy of money, but by force of character rising above your limitations and hindrances. Then you will have done something for your sex."

"For my sex!" repeated Mrs. Hernandez with frank derision. "She has always that bone in her mouth! She wants me to be a shining light, Mr. Hartley! She is always preaching that it especially behooves the emancipated woman who has flung away old-fashioned conventions like so much useless lumber, to set a good example. I tell her that she insists that a woman, having got rid of her fetters, bolts, and bars, should be brought up

against a ten-barred gate which she cannot climb or jump over."

"Yes, I believe in ten-barred gates," said Eugenia under her breath.

"That is the way she speaks to me at times, out of a fourth-story window," pursued Mrs. Hernandez, growing always more and more in high spirits. "She will not understand that I do not wish to be a statue of propriety, that I am a child, always was and always shall be a child,—that there is something within me that refuses to grow up. Perhaps it is the lawless Western training in me that gives me a sense of expectation, of longing that something shall happen - shall drift up from the unknown. I want more than other women seem to be satisfied with. In some ways I have more than they have, vet at times I am miserable; I say to myself that women with none of my money, youth, or good looks seem to get hold of everything, while I have nothing, nothing at all."

Hartley laughed. He found it no easy matter to keep up with this constant metamorphosis, these abrupt transitions of mood.

"You put so many new ideas buzzing in my head," he exclaimed, "I cannot classify them all. I should say you had everything."

"Not everything."

Hartley's eyes showed lurking fun.

"You are young, beautiful," he said with a little wave of the hand.

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- "Go on."
- "You have adorers."
- "Who are they? Tell me," she cried eagerly.
- "I know one, at least, intimately."
- "Tell me about him. What sort of a man is he? Where does he live?"
  - "Here, close to you in New York."
  - "Is he young?"
  - "Young enough, not too young."
  - "Handsome?"
  - "H'm, I might say handsome enough; not too handsome."
    - " Rich?"
    - "Alas, far from rich."

She burst into light laughter.

- "Your description is not over-flattering. Not too young, not too handsome, not at all rich. Is he in love with me?"
  - "Ardently, desperately."
- "That is a point in his favor." She met his glance ironically, almost insolently. "He must love me to distraction," she said imperiously. "He must please me."
- "How is a man to please you?" he asked with a humble but fervid glance.

She let her glance pass over his face, her lips still smiling, her eyes full of pride and coquetry.

"I like pleasure, life, movement; I like a man who lives, not one who plods on, looking neither to right nor left, intent on some far-off goal; not one who if his window happens to open towards the north, towards cold, bleakness, darkness, makes no effort at any cost to cut through a passageway to warmth and sunshine. Above all, I hate a man who is not content to take me as I am, but wishes to form me after some imaginary ideal of his own."

It seemed to Hartley, gazing at her, as if this plodder, this idealist, were in her mind's eye. "And although," she went on, "it does not matter to me practically, I like a man to be rich. I cannot see why a man with any energy or resolution need be poor. Nature has poured out everything in such reckless profusion,—gold, silver, precious stones lie at his feet, and all he has to do is to stoop and pick them up. He has only to plow the prairie, sprinkle it with grain, and it laughs with a rich harvest; or if he is ashamed to dig and plow let him buy a whole township for a song and sell it foot by foot for a fortune. Certainly there seems no excuse for a man's being poor in this country where everything has a push behind it."

Hartley was laughing.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I was only reflecting that you seem to have had a happy experience."

"No, I have not had a happy experience; but here I am, only twenty-nine years of age, with plenty of money."

"I am thirty-one," said Hartley; "I began with high expectations. I had some capital; I put it

into a fairly good business; I have had an honest partner who has kept me from actual disaster. But with me the push, instead of being upwards, has always been downwards,—bad times, bad luck, over competition, lack of the requisite insight into good chances, Roylance's love of the safe side!"

She was listening intently, evidently weighing the worth of this confession.

- "All the same," she observed, "you don't seem conquered."
  - "No, I am not conquered."
- "You take the world easily; you seem to me just fitted to be a rich man."
  - "Exactly my own idea on the subject."
- "Why don't you marry a rich woman?" she asked.

He remained silent, secretly enraged, yet he kept his kindled glance fixed upon her.

- "I don't mean myself necessarily," she now explained laughing. "I was referring to the past. You must have had many opportunities. I wonder that you did not pick up a great heiress years ago."
- "I have a heart, unluckily," he managed to say with some feeling, although conscious of the inadequacy of such a phrase addressed to a clear-headed woman.

She continued to look at him ironically, her head a little on one side.

"Evidently," she observed, "you are romantic.
"I suppose it is marriage which ends all that.

Still men always talk of love, love, love. They don't understand the key-note of the modern woman, do they, Eugenia?"

Miss Shepard - perhaps desiring while this intimate conversation was going on to efface herself as much as possible - was sitting apparently absorbed in looking down at her two hands clasped together on the edge of the table. Dinner was over; it had been an elaborate meal of the sort to suit the palate of a gourmand, and it was clear that Mrs. Hernandez was one, rejecting anything simple and accepting each novelty in the way of made dishes. Champagne had been the only beverage, and of this she had taken enough to exhilarate her, give added color to her cheeks and brilliancy to her eyes. had more than ever struck Hartley that Miss Shepard in every way made an ineffectual protest against the self-indulgence, the laissez-faire of her patroness. She ate sparingly of plain meat and vegetables, refused wine, and kept her glass supplied from her own water-bottle. Still, Hartley said to himself, she may be a dyspeptic and without high moral intention in all this display of heroic selfsacrifice before proffered luxury. When she did not reply on the instant to Mrs. Hernandez's question he pressed it anew, - what was the dominant chord in the mind of modern women?

"I suppose she means the desire to follow out the law of her own being," Miss Shepard answered reluctantly.

"No, I mean simply and greedily, ambition," said Mrs. Hernandez, who was now busy with the sweets which crowned the repast. She looked at Hartley with her bright mocking glance. "If a woman is poor she wants money, at least what money can buy. But when she has all the money she knows how to spend, when she has fine clothes, diamonds, handsome rooms, then she feels there is something else, - she is conscious of certain limitations; she feels her lack of education, of experience, of the sort of refinement which only comes from contact with people who have the habit of the things she is not quite used to. Now it is not romantic love which tempts such a woman! What a man had better urge is his ability to offer her a position where she may be a social centre, regarded, run after, made the fashion."

She flung this at Hartley, as it were, like a challenge.

He looked back at her, smiling, slightly satirical. "Yes, you are ambitious," he said.

"Too ambitious?" she asked eagerly.

"Money can do a good deal, but to enjoy the very flower of things you must have family, the habit of society, the ease and charm which only come from long social supremacy."

"I may not have birth, I may not have breeding," she returned, quite simply and earnestly, evidently impressed by his words. "But I know my own power,—and I believe in myself. I never

yet saw a woman I did not feel I could first imitate, then equal and surpass." She paused to drop a lump of sugar into her coffee, then drank it slowly. "Besides, I am rich, and I am all the while growing richer."

"Shall we go into the other room?" said Miss

Shepard dryly.

"You shall go into the other room if you prefer," said Mrs. Hernandez in her bright mocking way. "I shall smoke a cigarette with Mr. Hartley." She turned to the servant and dismissed him. "Thank heaven, he is gone," she remarked as the door closed behind him. "I never feel that I can talk freely before the creature. I am always wondering whether he is as wooden as he looks or whether he is listening to everything I say. Why do you smile, Eugenia?"

"I can fancy Mr. Hartley saying to himself, 'If this is her discretion, what would her indiscretion

be?'"

"Depend upon it, the man's mind is on your last fee and he is trying to deserve your next one," said Hartley. "Nothing you can say or do will alter his fixed impression that 'gentlefolks is remarkable queer.'"

"I said nothing before him," said Mrs. Hernandez, "except that I was rich and wanted to get on, and he knew all that before. I am myself. Unless I can be myself always, I am quite indifferent to promotion." She glanced at Miss Shepard,

who, slightly frowning, shook her head. "Oh, I know," she went on, "that I generally say, 'If other people do this or that, I will do this or that. If other people conform to that usage, I will conform.' But to-night I am at home. Mr. Hartley is my good friend, and what is the use of a friend if I have to be, on my best behavior?" She had lighted her cigarette at the taper, and began to smoke it in the slow, luxurious Spanish fashion. "I do not pose as a great lady," she proceeded. "I love to think of what I came from. In fact, if I had never been poor I could not get half the comfort out of my money I do now. I could not properly enjoy such a dinner as this we have just eaten if I did not remember the buckwheat cakes and saleratus biscuits of my infancy."

Hartley was ready to humor her mood for reminiscence. "I wish you would tell me about yourself," he said. "All that you have been a part of interests me."

She took her cigarette from her lips and bent a deep look on him.

"You must not be too fastidious, then," she said.

"Remember that I grew up in a country where everything was in a condition of chaos, — everything was forming before our eyes, — nothing came ready-made."

"I understand all that."

She sat leaning forward, not touching the high back of the embossed red-velvet-covered chair, resting her plump left elbow on the table, and now and then bringing the eigarette to her lips. At her right was a small glass of liqueur which she occasionally sipped, meantime nibbling at the bonbons.

"My name as a girl was Bella Brown," she said.
"I like to be called Bella. I hate my married title."

Hartley, inclined to act up to his rôle with spirit, repeated the name she liked under his breath, but with such unmistakable fervor that Miss Shepard blushed angrily and turned away, making a pretense of busying herself with the crimson shade of one of the candles.

"Yes, call me Bella," said Mrs. Hernandez, laughing. "I am Bella Brown first and always. Some of Eugenia's friends advocate a woman's retaining her maiden name after marriage, and I go with such views heartily. Marriage does not change a woman's identity any more than it changes a man's. When I wake up in the morning and look about my room, I often say to myself 'This is I, Isabella Brown!' My father," she went on, "was Timothy Brown of Castine, Maine. He went West a little too late for the height of the gold fever. He married in California." She paused a moment, then proceeded. "My mother was half Mexican."

"Ah, that is it," said Hartley. "I never thought of it before, but I perceive now that there is something foreign in your look and manner."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I am not very

proud of my Mexican blood," she exclaimed. "I prefer to remember that my father was a well educated New England man. He was unlucky, but he was the best thing that ever happened to me. If he were only alive now I might make up to him for his hard lines. He was so poor, always so poor! while the man beside him picked up nuggets of gold, his gravel panned out a dollar to the ton. You see I know what poverty is, Mr. Hartley. I have been through every phase of it; I understand, too, what is behind it, - a shirking of responsibility, a lack of quick decision, the unwillingness to look at things fairly and squarely, putting off, instead of feeling every time the sun comes up, 'This is the Day of Judgment.' Still I loved my father and was proud of his having had a college education. I am thankful to him for making me speak good English, and I forgive him for dragging us through the mire as he did. The first comfort I can recall came when I was eighteen years old. He ran a boarding-house at Whitehouse Creek, close by the new silver diggings. It was a sensible enterprise and fairly successful. I used to wait at table. Should you have believed it?"

"You are a part of all that you have met," quoted Hartley, "and that is what it is to live. I myself seem in comparison to have been a dreary, bored observer."

"If you could have seen the meals we used to set out! If you could have seen the men who took

their places at table! If you could have heard them talk, in good humor, in bad humor! If you could have seen, as I did, more than once, the meal end in a free fight, and two men carried out dead, you might call it something beyond a mere cut-and-dried existence. However, I was used to it; I was full of spirit and energy; I was proud of being the quickest and lightest of foot of all the ten girls."

"I am perfectly certain," said Hartley, "that every man at table wanted you to wait on him."

"You bet."

As this phrase issued from the full rosy lips, Miss Shepard,—who had for the last half hour been wrought up to a state of nervous exasperation—gave utterance to some inaudible expression, started to her feet, and walked into the next room. Bella gazed after her, changed color, and, coming back to a sense of the conventionalities she had offended, threw away her cigarette and pushed aside the glass of Chartreuse.

"You led me on," she said to Hartley with the droll grimace of a naughty child about to be punished for a fault. "Now I shall have to go down on my knees to Eugenia."

"Was it the slang which horrified her, or the bit of autobiography?"

"She had been sitting on thorns for some time," said Bella. "I saw she disapproved of me, but I felt like going on. I told you she was my con-

science-keeper," said Bella, jumping up. "Now you must come and help me make it up with her."

She led the way into the parlor, where Miss Shepard was sitting at a table, pretending to be looking over a book of etchings.

"Here we are, Eugenia," said Bella, in the tone of a coaxing child. "Please forgive everything, and be friends."

But Miss Shepard did not move or look up as Bella, approaching behind her, shook her playfully by the shoulders.

"I think you are a highly inconsistent woman," she went on lightly. "You are all for freedom, for emancipation, for suffrage, for every possible right of woman. You insist that we are not to be tied down to tradition, that each of us is to find within us the law which ought to govern us; yet the moment I jar upon your superfine sensibilities you are horrified."

Miss Shepard pushed her book away, but sat with a furrow between her brows, gazing fixedly before her.

"You used to call me the apostle of your theories," Bella continued playfully.

"But what an apostle! An apostle to what a gospel!"

She broke off as Bella burst into a fit of laughter.

"Tell me, Mr. Hartley," she cried, full of mischief, "am I not a delightful instance of the emancipated female?"

"If you treat my creeds lightly," said Miss Shepard in a strained, discordant voice, "you put me in the wrong."

"Oh no, I do not mean to put you in the wrong. I put nobody in the wrong except myself. Don't judge Eugenia by me, Mr. Hartley. She has lofty standards, high principles. She fasts while I feast. She does not drink champagne; she declares it goes to her head. I say that is where I want it to go; what is life without a little intoxication? When I try to induce her to put on a becoming gown she says stoically, 'I prefer to be as ugly as nature made me.' How can I live up to an example of such high courage?"

"You make me out a very absurd person," said Eugenia.

"On the contrary, you are such a consistent person I have to strike a balance by being inconsistent. Then you know very well it is not in my nature to pretend, and when I am in good spirits I bubble over. Come now, kiss and be friends."

She suited the action to the words; and Eugenia yielded with rather an ill grace. "I was wrong," she said reluctantly. "I am a very bad-tempered person, I suppose. But after all, if you hire a music master to teach you the piano and he raps you on the fingers if you play false you do not say to him, 'You are very particular.'"

"No, I deserved the rebuke," said Bella demurely.
"I ask you to forgive, I ask everybody to for-

give me." She flung herself against the pile of cushions on the sofa. "It is the wild Mexican blood in my veins, I suppose," she continued. "Sometimes I hate it. Then again I would not have it left out of my composition for the sake of being mistress of all the cold proprieties of the world."

She glanced at Hartley, who stood looking on, a little at a loss to know what to say or to do. What he experienced was a sense of being led a strange dance into a new region where familiar lights failed him and there was a jumble of the attractive and the bizarre. He tried to rally his powers to answer the necessities of the occasion.

"Spanish and Puritan meet in you," he said; "and it is always the marriage of contraries which gives temperament."

"The Mexican in me enjoys color and warmth," said Bella unreservedly. "It likes getting its sensations cheap. If I were Mexican only I might have been a circus girl; for when I was ten years old I could ride a half-broken mustang that everybody else was afraid of. But the Puritan is strong in me, —it will come in."

"I rejoice to hear it," said Eugenia.

"Poor Eugenia," said Bella; "she never in her life acted on an impulse, — she knows nothing but cold-blooded reason. Now to-night, the Mexican gets the better of the Puritan in me. I am still run away with by high spirits. At this moment I long to dance."

"Do dance," said Hartley. He kept his gaze fixed upon her with a sort of fascinated expectation. Her eyes emitted light. She seemed to feel such a superabundance of life that she threw it off in an electrical current which influenced him to a degree. Her feet began to move as to imaginary music.

"Eugenia, dear, good Eugenia, may I dance?" she entreated coaxingly.

"Oh dance, dance all you like," said Eugenia, half in anger and half in scorn. "It is not a dancing world to me, but if it is to you, act out your humor." At this permission, Bella started up joyfully and darted like a flash out of the room. Hartley, gazing after her in blank amazement, turned inquiringly towards Miss Shepard, who, with a little gesture as if deprecating his judgment, said, "She has gone to change her gown. She is in a wild mood to-night which she has to work off somehow, and she may as well dance. I sometimes suspect that her mother was half Indian, besides being half Mexican. She is incorrigible. I can perceive that you are shocked in every instinct. It is not worth while. I teach myself to be patient. If I permitted her vagaries to afflict me beyond the moment, I should not live here another day."

"I am not shocked," said Hartley. "I am rather amused. She has a refreshing touch of wildness in her nature."

"You can be lenient, because you have no

sense of responsibility. But it puts me in the wrong. It puts me terribly in the wrong." As she said this he advanced a step nearer, looking at her so eagerly that, as if fearful he might magnify her meaning, she hastened to add: "Not that there is anything worse than this frivolity which she will repent to-morrow. She is simply run away with by her vanity and a sort of theatricality."

"You and she are very unlike," observed Hartley.

"Unlike!" repeated Miss Shepard with peculiar emphasis.

"Still, in spite of the unlikeness you find something in her to awaken interest and regard."

"She pays me," said Miss Shepard, as if the words stung her. "I needed money, not for myself but for my sister, who has five children and whose husband deserted her. Mrs. Hernandez advertised in San Francisco for a companion. I answered and we struck a bargain. She gives me a good salary. I am to chaperone her, as she calls it, and to the extent of my influence do all I can in her behalf. She lent me, to begin with, a handsome sum of money. I accepted the position out of pure greed."

"Don't lower your own motives. Evidently you were already embarked in a career; you seem to be a well-known woman. I see your name in the papers."

"I had no power; I was tied hand and foot by

lack of money; I was in debt. Still, my reputation has been of use to her,—and I may as well confess that, to begin with, at any rate, I flattered my scruples by imposing upon myself and others the belief that she was a shining instance of the modern woman."

"Are you disappointed?"

"Disappointed? Can I uphold a woman who sees immunities where I see duties? If I have preached the necessity of throwing aside certain obligations she does not feel binding and sacred, it is that she should take up obligations she does make binding and sacred."

Hartley gazed at her intently; her words roused a powerful curiosity.

"She makes me hate my own views," said Eugenia almost fiercely, although she spoke just above her breath. "She makes me doubt, indeed, whether I have any views which can stand the test of the wear and tear of everyday life."

"Views are a terrible encumbrance," said Hartley. He still gazed at her as if fascinated. He longed yet dreaded to end this uncertainty. Eugenia was the one person who could answer the question which lurked behind the simplest suggestions, and which put an interrogation point after each of Mrs. Hernandez's indiscretions.

"You rouse more curiosity than you gratify," he said.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I don't quite understand you -- "

"Can't you see that there seems to be a sort of mystery, that"—

She made an angry gesture. "Rest assured," she said harshly, "that if there were anything actually wrong I should not be here. This is her story. She married a certain rather notorious Colonel Higby, from whom she was divorced. I fancy she had believed him to be rich, but he turned out to be a poor man. It was a terrible experience. She has told me things about her life with him which made it justifiable for her to try to regain her freedom. Then she became the wife of Aurelio Hernandez. As long as he lived she was under the yoke. But the bondage only lasted three years; then he died suddenly and she came into his possessions. If she boasts of her money vulgarly it is because she is still in the wildest spirits on finding herself free and rich beyond all her dreams. She can conceal nothing, - with her everything is on the surface."

"So that is her history," said Hartley with an intense relief, and dismissing he knew not what swarming vague apprehensions from his mind.

"That is her history. She is not a woman who analyzes her experience and acts intelligently and logically upon the knowledge of life she has gained. Still, she does usually realize, quite as much as I, that when a woman sacrifices a great many things which most of her sex regard as essential, she must be earnest, consistent, and

sincere. But sometimes she gets excited and is carried away."

"Here I am," said a voice in the distance.
"Was I gone a long time?"

Hartley had retreated to a safe distance from Eugenia by the time Bella lifted the portière and stood framed there like a picture. She had thrown off her trailing evening gown and put on a short one of diaphanous black, spangled with gold, the skirt composed of fine quillings and plaitings which clung to her shape, yet were capable of expanding to yards on yards of circumference. She still wore the gold ornaments on her neck and wrists, and in her hands carried a mantilla of lace.

"Now, Eugenia," she said, coming towards them, "go to the piano and play a waltz, — not too fast at first."

Eugenia, with her slow, reluctant way of seeming to do against her taste and judgment what she was coerced to do, obeyed.

"How is this?" she inquired, beginning an adaptation of a Spanish air.

"A little too fast," said Bella. She made a slight courtesy to Hartley, then, negligent, smiling, swaying first one way and then the other, began gracefully to advance and recede, holding the mantilla before her and waving it.

"Charming!" said Hartley, and clapped his hands.

The applause excited her. "Faster!" she cried

to Eugenia; threw aside the mantilla, and, gathering into her hands instead a fold of her airy and glittering draperies, she made them undulate with the rhythm of the music. As she moved, she kept her brilliant gaze fixed upon Hartley, compelling him to feel the fire of her eyes, and at the same time communicating to him in some subtle way an uneasy sense of restlessness as her fluttering, sparkling raiment vibrated continuously to the modulations of the waltz, throwing out its fiery spangles like a swarm of golden bees.

"Faster!" she cried again; and with the accelerated pace, the gauzy skirts seemed to become wings which emitted flashes like the darting of fireflies out of the blackness of a tropical night. The cheeks of the dancer flushed a deeper crimson; her dark eyes grew brighter and brighter; her lips more and more smiling. She was almost alarming.

Eugenia brought her fingers down on the piano with a crash.

"That is enough," she said, shut the instrument, and rose.

Hartley, whose impression was quite as much of repugnance as of allurement, was ready to echo her words.

- "Did you like it?" demanded Bella, radiant.
- "I might use twenty adjectives," said Hartley, "but will content myself with one. It was charming."

She took her favorite attitude on the sofa, laughing.

"From a child, I always loved to dance," she said. "It was the first, about the only thing, my mother taught me. My father considered it wicked; he believed all such amusements to come straight from the Prince of Darkness. Astonishing, how ideas implanted in our infancy cling! It is when I feel restless, experimental, rather wicked, that I want to dance. Don't frown, Eugenia; I have worked it off; I'm as good as gold." She beckoned to Hartley to draw a chair by her side. "Now, the rest of the evening, you shall entertain me," she said.

And he obeyed, to the extent of his ability.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## KATHLEEN MAKES UP HER MIND.

AFTER Garthe had left her that evening, Constance continued to stand just where she had taken leave of him. She was pale, perturbed, dissatisfied with herself; once she pressed the palms of her hands against her temples, as if to still some throbbing there; then the blood rushed to her face, and she smiled as if moved by some sudden hint of happy recollection.

Kathleen presently entered, radiant.

"How is the cold?" she asked. "I did not expect to find you waiting up for me."

"The cold?" repeated Constance, forgetting. Then a deep glow overspread her face. "It is better," she made haste to say. "In fact, I think it is quite cured."

"That comes of staying in and nursing it," said Kathleen. "Still, you missed a good deal." She sat down before the fire, dropped her wraps from her shoulders, and went on talking with animation about the opera, the singers, the women who had been in the boxes, the men who had dropped in to see her and Mrs. Challoner. Mr. Marchmont had sat behind her all the evening. Never had she

known him in such a delightful humor; he seemed to have come to charm and to be charmed.

"Sometimes, of late," Kathleen proceeded, "he has been a little tormenting. He has seemed to laugh at me, to find me infantile; he has talked as if he had given up, in disgust, everything I cared about; has discussed the question of whether there ought not to be an asylum and a pension for old men past fifty years of age, in order that they might not be in the way of young people; he has quoted all the poetry he knew about old age; oh, he has made me unhappy! But to-night, one would have said that the longer a man lived the better he knew how to be amusing. The young men seemed so stiff and heavy, or silly, in comparison. I listened to nobody else. I cared for nobody else."

It startled Constance to have Kathleen appear thus to confirm all Garthe's predictions. It was not only a relief to believe that Kathy and Mr. Marchmont were a little in love with each other, but that Garthe was right, that he was gifted with knowledge and insight. His clear divination of the state of the case seemed to justify her when she found that his voice lingered in her ear, that she was still under the thrill of his touch, of his vivid glance. Not that she yielded, even in imagination, to the spell they could cast over her. "No, no, no," she said to herself, just as she had said it to him. Still, before she could compose herself to sleep, it was necessary to go over and

over again the details of that strange and unexpected interview; strange and unexpected, yet she realized that somehow the germ of feeling for him must have been in her mind already. No sooner had she looked up, that evening, and seen him advancing towards her, than her very soul had stirred like a flame quickened by a wind.

From the moment they had met, she had been conscious that in some subtle way an intimacy of feeling had been established between them. She had explained it to herself by saying that she had divined in him just those qualities of heart and head which were to move Kathy. He talked little. but, when he did talk, with a few well-directed touches he made his point and created the effect he needed to produce. Clever or not clever, he seemed to Constance a strong man, and she was ready to accept the ascendency he at once established over her, because it was to include Kathy as well. She had vindicated the charm she found in his society by talking to him constantly of Kathy, by withdrawing her own personality, by saying "we," not "I," by showing him frankly that she considered it a happy accident when she saw him sitting with Kathy, talking, listening, comparing notes, in the easy, intimate fashion of people who have much in common. She had filled up any personal sense of loss and blankness by her satisfaction in the thought that she was scrupulously faithful to her trust, - that Kathy was to be happy.

But to-night when he had stood smiling down at her, complaining that he found her changed, such little artifices had shriveled up before his practical decision and swift insight. The significance of his words dawned gradually upon her mind. She had been used to believing that many things were out of the question for herself; she had never been so covetous as to wish for them, - had been contented with desiring them for Kathy. She had, altogether, to change the focus of things in general, before she could rightly apprehend the facts of the case as Garthe saw them. What was needed was a constant readjustment of the arguments to a practical point of view. Garthe, who certainly was a man of more defined and resolute will than most people she had known, was not in love with Kathy, nor, according to his view, was Kathy in love with him. By what right or with what reason could she then go on picturing the delightful result of their mutual attraction? She felt humbly that she had, so far, apprehended her duties quite falsely, starting from no fixed high principle and following up the lead to no worthy conclusion. She desired Kathy's happiness, but had blindly set to work to make her miserable. If Kathy had fallen in love with Garthe in the face of his indifference, or rather of his clear preference for somebody else, what general misery! Constance liked best that night to accept, although with some soreness of feeling, his theory that Kathy and Mr. Marchmont were attached to each other. Many little incidents now seemed to give weight to it, to brush aside like cobwebs all that impeded her belief in it. So much for conscience before she let her fancy get the upper hand; before she permitted herself to remember how, even before Garthe spoke, she met his eyes and recognized the approach of a supreme moment; how a constraint was upon her which made her feel with mingled joy and terror that she must meet it. How all this had come to pass she could not tell, and searched in vain for a clew to the mystery. Only one thing was clear to her, — that Garthe loved her, not another; not Kathy, but herself; and without to-night trying to analyze the thrill of joy which came along with her perception of the fact, she asked herself whether she could have vielded even to Kathy that joy immeasurable of knowing herself beloved? There was a secret intoxication in the conviction that she could no more yield up Garthe's love than she could govern the stars in their courses; so for that night she taught herself to be absolutely selfish.

Next day she was brought to earth by her own arrow.

Kathy, blithe and light-hearted, had gone out after breakfast, but returned before noon flushed, flurried, with a brow showing painful perplexity.

"Oh, Constance," she wailed, flying up the staircase. "Oh, Constance!"

Constance, answering the call, ran towards her, and the two encountered on the landing.

"Oh, what is it?" cried the girl, opening her arms.

Kathy rushed into them and nestled there.

"Oh, such a dreadful thing has happened; such a monstrous, incredible thing I hardly dare tell you," she gasped.

Constance, full of terror, drew her into the sunny

morning-room, and closed the door.

"But you must tell me. What is it?" she said. gazing into the face before her, alternately flushing and paling.

"I can't," returned Kathy with an air of des-

peration.

She permitted herself to be established on the lounge, to have cushions piled behind her, to have her bonnet, wrap, and gloves taken off, and salts offered. Then she burst into tears.

- "You make me so anxious," murmured Constance.
- "I know," said Kathy. She tried to speak; she could not utter more than these two syllables. She blushed, tried to hide her face against the girl's shoulder and began again; then, frightened, suddenly checked herself. It was now easy to sob, and she sobbed like a heart-broken child.
- "But, Kathy," cried Constance, "I cannot endure such suspense."
- "I am afraid if I tell you what happened that you will never speak to me again," faltered Kathy.

Constance's thoughts instantly reverted to Garthe. She grew pale.

- "Nothing could make any difference with me," she said with desperate resolution.
  - "Are you sure?"
- "Perfectly sure. I could love you through anything."
- "I 've I 've I 've been in sul ted," whispered Kathy.
- "Insulted? By whom?" cried Constance, all the blood rushing to her heart.
- "I don't know who he is. Of course he is a perfect stranger to me. That was the horror of it."
  - "But what did he do?"
  - "He pursued me," said Kathy tragically.
  - "Pursued you?"
  - "I mean he followed me."
  - "Followed you home?"
- "I don't know," said Kathy with a gesture of despair. "I did not look back. I simply turned and fled." She drew Constance down on the couch beside her, and they embraced, each with a tremulous sensitiveness. "Oh," she went on, "I never had such a horrible experience. It changed all my ideas in a moment. It made me feel, as nothing else could, dear, that you are right."
- "I don't quite understand," said Constance with indefinable mistrust. "How do you mean that I am right?"
- "In thinking that I ought to marry again, to marry Mr. Garthe," whispered Kathy, her cheek against the girl's, her whole fragile being thrilling

and palpitating with an ardent vitality like a bird's. Still tenderly conscious although Constance was of that highly wrought mood, at this confession she started away, stood at a little distance, and made an effort to collect her thoughts. But her brain reeled as she tried her wits at the riddle. It was impossible to think acutely.

"But tell me, please tell me, what happened?" she implored.

"You will say it was all my fault," murmured Kathy, her face scarlet. "That is the reason I am so ready to give up my independence. I want to be taken care of by somebody who is wise and calm; it would be such a relief to have a man like Mr. Garthe always at my side. I feel just as you do, there is something about him so different from most men," she went on, in a soft justification of herself. "He says to me 'Sit here,' and I sit down so meekly. He told me that he felt as if everybody ought to read that book on Socialism, and I have gone through it, taking twenty pages a day, although it does not interest me at all." She paused a moment and looked at Constance with her limpid glance. "Then you wish it, darling," she added conclusively and finally. "I have come to think that marrying him would be the best thing that could happen to me. I intend no longer to struggle against the feeling."

Constance had sunk down on the window seat at a little distance. It seemed to her the room was

turning round. It was their favorite nest, fresh, coquettish, elegant, hung in pale blue, with rows of white jars at the windows full of flowering plants; a large picture of Bernard Garner filled the space over the mantel, innumerable sketches in pen-andink and water-colors signed by their friends were grouped on the walls, and everywhere, on tables and cabinets, were a hundred pretty feminine knick-knacks. The place was full of soft light and cheerful heat, but what Constance experienced was a strange bleakness, a desert loneliness.

"You don't say anything?" cried Kathy with a pathetic accent.

"It is all so incomprehensible to me," said Constance. "Some dreadful thing happened, you say, which changed all your opinions in an instant; yet you do not tell what it was."

"How can you bring it all back? I wish you would let me forget it. It robs me of all my self-respect. I want to look forward to something comfortable instead."

"But I must understand. I cannot go on with this horrible feeling that something painful has happened to you. The earth seems to shake under my feet."

"But, Constance, it is over now, and I wish never to think of it again. And really I cannot help feeling," pursued Kathy sentimentally, "as if there were something almost providential in it. It has made me feel my loneliness; I never before quite realized it. I see now that I was never meant to go about in this irresponsible, unrestrained way. I need somebody to give me a law and to make me obey that law."

"But first, dear Kathy, let me know what"—

"If I can bear it," said Kathy with some stateliness, "if I can afford to forget and forgive it, I do really consider that other people might do the same. I wish you would talk about something pleasanter, Constance. Talk about the future. It is so odd and unexpected," she continued, blushing as her eager glance rose to the other's face, "that I should have been so instantly converted to your theories. Now when you first spoke about Mr. Garthe I was not in love with him at all. I enjoyed my own liberty. Although I rather liked to think about the idea, look at it in different lights, go forward and back, I really did not wish to marry anybody. My conception of happiness was to live with you always. It is so sweet here with you, dear. I think I vastly prefer women to men. Of course men may be useful. I like them to come in and see me. They amuse me,-they get facts at first hand and tell one things, and they are interesting to tell things to. I was perfectly satisfied to go on as we were going. I never should have tired of it. But, Constance, - I see now, it was n't safe."

Kathy, absorbed in her own impressions, did not perceive that Constance was strangely excited. There were tears in her eyes, her color came and went, her hands trembled.

"Kathy," she said forcibly, "I insist that you shall tell me what happened."

"I was going on to say," Kathy proceeded, gathering solemnity into voice and manner, "that I have utterly changed my mind. Some women may be able to get along unmarried, but I have no belief in myself any longer. I need a husband to look after me." She looked at Constance, counting on her sympathy, but to her surprise the girl, with overflowing tears, suddenly smote her temples with her hands, crossed the room, and stood looking out of the window.

"I thought," said Kathy, rather aggrieved, "that you at least would be pleased. You said you approved of my marrying again, and you quite insisted that I should fall in love with Mr. Garthe."

"I am thinking of what happened this morning," said Constance, without turning away from the window. "I can have no peace of mind until I know."

"I wish you would let it rest," returned Kathy with a deep sigh, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously.

"Tell me, Kathy dear," said Constance, darting back to the sofa, sitting down beside her step-mother and putting her arms about her. "You know so well that whatever you suffer I suffer,—whatever you feel I feel,—whatever happens to you happens to me. If anything vexes and mortifies

you I cannot live until I do my best to overcome it. Kathy, darling Kathy, tell me."

"You will say it is all my fault," faltered Kathy.

"But if it is your fault"-

"I don't like to be told over and over," said Kathy, rebellious tears gathering in her lovely blue eyes, "that I do not seem to have any sense of propriety. I know I keep doing something odd, but such odd things seem to happen to me. I have tried to school myself into good manners, I try to be rather superior, — but all the same, I — " she broke off with a sob.

"You have charming manners," said Constance warmly. "Your mistakes are more refreshing than other people's perfections."

"Still, you admit that I always do make mistakes," Kathy went on. "You said the other night that with me something unexpected always happened. You know it was at that dinner at the Frosts', and in front of me was a tall pyramid of fruit. I kept saying all the time how delightful it was; it was like a screen and hid me from everybody,—and Teddy Winslow and I pretended to have great goings on behind it. Then all at once, as he was skirmishing after my glass of champagne, I happened to touch an orange, and the whole edifice toppled over and the fruit went careering madly down the table. Of course everybody stared at us and made jokes. I dared not raise my eyes again all through the dinner."

This was such sheer swerving away from the subject in hand that Constance would not condescend to make any response to it.

"Tell me what happened, Kathy dear," she said again, and as she spoke put her hand against the soft cheek and brought the face close to hers. In this position they surveyed each other, each with moist eyes, quivering lips, and crimson cheeks.

"I don't want to tell," said Kathy nervously.

"But you will tell me, dear. Where were you when it happened?"

"At the library," faltered Kathy. "You know that you yourself asked me to go there and change a book."

"I know, Well?"

"As I went up the stairs it seemed to me I caught sight of Mr. Marchmont going into the reading-room. I said to myself, 'If that is Mr. Marchmont and he could get a book for me and go shopping with me and then to Mrs. Challoner's, and then come back with me to lunch, it would be charming."

"Of course."

"You know I really thought it was Mr. Marchmont," said Kathy piteously. "There was the same hat, the same greatcoat, the same gray trousers. It did seem a little singular that he did not see me, for usually he catches sight of me at any distance. But all the same I was as certain that it was Mr. Marchmont as that this is you, Constance.

The question was how to get at him in the men's reading-room. Of course I did not think of opening the door and looking in, - I was perfectly well aware that that would never have done; but there was a little crack over the hinge, and I peeped. I suppose I saw what I wanted to see, for I was positive I recognized Mr. Marchmont and nobody else sitting at a table, just at the left of the entrance. There was Mr. Marchmont's hat, Mr. Marchmont's back hair, Mr. Marchmont's muffler, greatcoat, and tweed trousers. It seemed so pleasant to see him I kept staring in as if fascinated, until a librarian, or a messenger boy, somebody who belonged to the institution, came out of the opposite door and looked at me as if quite shocked. 'Did vou want anything in the men's reading-room?' he asked, as if he supposed I was looking in just out of feminine curiosity. So, to justify myself, I told him that I saw a very particular friend of mine inside, and wished to speak to him. He had lately entered, he sat at the left hand of the door, - had a white silk muffler, black felt hat, and - 'Shall I tell him there is a lady in the passage waiting to speak to him?' asked the creature. 'Yes!' I answered: 'ask him to come out at once.'" paused; she cowered; then, as if gathering herself up by a supreme effort, she cried out piteously, "Oh, Constance!"

"Go on," said Constance, inflexibly prepared to meet the worst.

- "Oh, how can I go on?" moaned Kathy.
- "Did the man go after Mr. Marchmont?"
- "He grinned, —he grinned hideously; he set off at a run; he gave the baize doors a push, darted inside, and left me waiting. It was all very disagreeable. I felt like—like Andromeda, but I expected Mr. Marchmont to come and deliver me. I stood looking at the doors, expecting shortly to see them swing wide open. Then all at once "-

"They opened and"—

"Don't interrupt me," said Kathy in desperation. "They did open, surely enough! A man's figure appeared, - the figure of a youngish man, - rather, in an odious way, a good-looking man! He smiled, came straight towards me. I stood rooted to the spot. I seemed to have grown there. Something held my eyes staring wide open at him, as if he had been a supernatural apparition. My throat ached, - my tongue was glued to the roof of my mouth. He came nearer and nearer. 'Is this the lady who is waiting to speak to me?' he asked in a soft, insinuating way. I tried to speak, to tell him I had quite mistaken him, that it was somebody quite different I had hoped might have on that hat, coat, and muffler. But I could not utter a syllable; I simply felt myself growing furiously red. 'I shall be so glad to do anything for you,' the horrible wretch continued, and tried to take my hand. was as if his touch were needed to set me free. moved, I turned, I darted down the stairs. He

was following me. The heavy door stopped me. As I was fumbling at the handle, he had time to approach. 'Allow me,' he said, and held it open with the most overwhelming politeness. I rushed past him without a look or word; at the corner I turned, I saw him coming; I ran up the street, rounded a second corner! He was still on my steps."

"Did he overtake you?" Constance inquired anxiously.

"I did not see him any more. When I mounted our own door-steps, I looked round fearfully, but there was nobody in the street."

She paused, exhausted, and, too much abashed to raise her eyes, kept them fixed on her lap.

"And that was all?" inquired Constance, with a feeling of relief.

"All?" repeated Kathy tragically. "I thought it was quite enough."

"It was uncomfortable, certainly," said Constance soothingly. "But if I were you I should not think of it again."

"I did not wish to recall it," cried Kathy, with great tears gathering in her eyes afresh. "I begged you over and over to let it all pass, but you would insist; and now that I have brought myself to confess it, you have an air of not minding. I supposed that even if you told me I had brought it all on myself you still would sympathize with me."

"I am indignant with the man; I do sympathize with you," said Constance, endeavoring to animate

her features with pity and with wrath. "I blame myself for letting you go out alone. You are too — too pretty, Kathy; too — too attractive; too — too young —"

"Yes," faltered Kathy. "I see it all, and I shall have to marry Mr. Garthe in self-defense." She glanced timidly at Constance, who grew pale and averted her face; then with a sense of being left unaided to fight her battle, Kathy exclaimed, with a note of protest, almost of indignation in her voice, "You know very well it was you who put the idea into my head. You said you wanted me to marry, and the moment Mr. Garthe began coming you showed me in every way that — in fact you seemed quite to insist on it."

Her words penetrated Constance, rousing her conscience. It was all true.

"You don't usually go forward and back," murmured Kathy. She did not possess the faculty of reading what went on inside of other minds, yet she had a quick instinct to perceive something alien, something inhospitable in Constance to this suggestion.

"If I do want you to marry again," said Constance wistfully, "it is only because we are not rich, — because —" she broke off. "But it shocks me to think of my seeming to single out a stranger — a —"

"He is not a stranger now," said Kathy. "I know him as well — almost better than I know anybody."

- "Oh, Kathy, not as you know dear Mr. Marchmont!"
- "Of course not as Mr. Marchmont. But then he is different."
  - "How different?"
- "I thought we were talking of somebody young enough young enough for me to fall in love with," murmured Kathy bashfully.
- "But, Kathy, Mr. Marchmont is not quite as old as papa was."
- "He is thirteen months younger, but that is no particular difference in age," said Kathy, with a hopeless sigh. "Until you told me you considered that your father was too old for me, such an idea had never occurred to me, and at first it hurt me,—it hurt me cruelly. Then after turning the matter over in my mind, I could not help seeing that it might be true. It gave me quite a shock to reflect that if Bernard had lived until I was seventy, he would have been about a hundred years old."

Perplexity gathered on the brow of Constance.

- "But after all," she observed, taking a momentary survey of this hypothesis, "the thirty years between you seem to have counted more when you were eighteen and he was forty-seven. Yet you had never minded that disparity."
- "No," said Kathy with another sigh, "it would have seemed to me treasonable, not to say ridiculous."
  - "He was so interested in everything you did.

Think how he used to admire your gowns, — what sweet loving little flatteries he had for you!"

"I know, — I know better than you can tell me."

"An older man loves youth for youth's sake; it touches him to think that his wife is young," continued Constance. "Mr. Marchmont and papa were alike in having a mingling of quiet sympathy and bright humor, which kept them in touch with life. I have heard you say that with Mr. Marchmont you are never at a loss, — that you are certain he feels everything with you, understands everything."

"Of course that is true," said Kathy.

"Nobody else can be as much to you as Mr. Marchmont," said Constance with a peculiar vibrating rote in her voice. "No lesser, newer friend can take his place."

Kathy made a gesture of despair.

"But why do you bring it all up, when you know you have put such different thoughts in my head?" she cried as if stung by regrets, even while thrilling under the consciousness of other and fresher privileges. "You said you wanted me to fall in love with somebody of my own age, somebody quite different from — from your dear father, who could — Unless you had suggested it, Constance, it would have seemed to me the most dreadful disloyalty. But I was sure you knew, — you are always so just, so wise! And now that I have accepted you as my guide, my philosopher, my friend, and have fallen in

love with somebody else, younger and more charming, you begin to try to make me feel sorrowful and repentant."

Constance writhed in torture. "Oh, Kathy, don't say such terrible things," she faltered.

"It is true, and I must say it," persisted Kathy recklessly. "It would have seemed to me wicked to fall in love. I had never thought of falling in love. But you wanted me to fall in love, and I have fallen in love."

Constance was appalled. With all her yearning tenderness for Kathy, her desire to see her happy, had she actually prepared for her such a pitfall as this, and led her blindly towards it? Was Kathy actually in love with Garthe? Yesterday, at such a declaration as this she had just made, Constance would have accepted it as something real. To-day she was wiser. It was impossible to believe it. Women did not fall in love in that way, when love meant the motive power of life, an influence subduing, transfiguring, re-creating. Kathy had not seen Garthe for two days, and yet had been until now in an everyday mood, speaking of him casually, not even in her thoughts seeming to dwell on him with particular interest. This sudden gust of feeling was wholly unaccountable, except on a theory of whim and caprice. For Constance said within herself, until one had seen Lawrence Garthe as she herself had seen him last night, with his air of quiet persistence, his vivid look, which seemed to fasten upon one and penetrate one's most secret thoughts, had met his smile, had heard his voice, had felt the clasp of his hand, one simply had no idea of him. A wave of feeling, of deep experience, of triumphant joy, surged over Constance. "No," she said to herself, "there is nothing between him and Kathy that all have not seen and heard."

"Why do you smile?" asked Kathy almost with reproach.

"Did I smile?" said Constance. "I suppose I was wondering if it had actually come to pass that you were in love."

"Indeed, I am very much in love," cried Kathy almost with indignation. "I think of nothing else."

Constance did not reply by words, but there was a dimple in her cheek, and a certain arch elevation of the eyebrows. She shook her head skeptically.

"I don't eare," said Kathy reeklessly. "I do think of him all the time almost and I am in love deeply." She paused a moment as if to weigh the effect of the thunderbolt she had launched, then went on. "When I was going to be married first I thought of nothing except that I should have ever so many new clothes, and that at last I should have a chance to go North. Now," she added with intense solemnity, "I do not think of those trivial matters at all."

This innocent and unhesitating assumption with which Kathy took everything for granted, drawing with eager faith on the absolutely conjectural to supply any chance deficit, had often enough delighted Constance; but now it not only seemed to invite tribulation, but it made her feel disloyal. She said very softly:—

"But one has to think, dear, whether Mr. Garthe on his side —" she broke off; she felt as if treachery lurked behind her words, as she met the full upturned glance.

"Oh," murmured Kathy with a delightful blush, "I cannot have the least doubt about his feelings." It was impossible to imagine a more exquisite sincerity of look and tone.

Constance was silent. She could not pursue that line of argument.

"What I cannot understand is," Kathy continued, pressing gently against the other's protecting arm, "that you do not seem more glad. It is just what you wished."

"I want you to be happy, dear, no doubt of that," said Constance.

It was lunch time, and when the meal was over it was necessary for her to see that their rooms were in readiness. It was the afternoon of the Finde-Siècle Club, and it was a comfort to observe that Kathy could enter into certain small preparations with some zest, although she had eaten almost nothing, observing that she was still shuddering over the horrible experience of the morning. It had, she declared anew, brought a sense of the most everyday things being ominous, dangerous. She

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was dismayed, crushed in spirit, and longed for nothing so much as the chance to sit down quietly and wait for rescue.

"Do you suppose he will come?" she asked Constance in a whisper.

# CHAPTER IX.

# AT THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE.

It was the way of the Fin-de-Siècle Club to sit in rows of chairs and listen to an essay or lecture on some subject which was later to be discussed by all the members. The keynote was modernité, the attitude of the members was receptivity, - an acceptance of any theory no matter how detached and transitory, capable of being regarded as a principle of human existence in the present or future. It was the fashion to belong to the Fin-de-Siècle. Mrs. Challoner was one of its promoters, and since its only real object was to gather impressions and to keep in touch with the questions of the hour, the individual convictions of Kathleen and Constance had nothing to do with their following Mrs. Challoner. Constance, who from her earliest girlhood had felt an instinctive seriousness, a scrupulosity of conscience, a desire to immolate herself, had so far been content with the opportunities of her own individual existence. Her young step-mother had indeed provided her with a special ground for ample exercise of her sympathy and prescience, her wish for rigorous selfdiscipline. So far she had not cared deeply for

the Fin-de-Siècle Club,—less than Kathy, indeed, who was very impressionable and for whom any basis of ultimate incertitude possessed fascinations of a high order.

When Kathy had asked "Do you think he will come to-day?" Constance had known very well that Garthe could not keep away on this, of all days; that he was sure not to miss a chance of seeing her, of meeting her glance, of passing speech with her. She knew it from her own need of seeing him, of his quick sympathy, his divination, his swift decision.

As the members of the club gathered, Constance observed Kathy with wonder and with admiration. To herself it was to-day constraint - almost torture — to be compelled to move about and address indifferent people. Her own heart was beating excitedly, the color came and went in her face, she was grave, unpliant, already weary of the occasion. Kathy, on the other hand, was frankly and irresistibly gay, giving her opinion on every subject, not only her opinion but illustrating her views by rapid summaries of experience, amusing little confessions; flying from one subject to another, complimenting one woman on the chic of her gown, asking another what she thought about the morality of the new novel everybody was reading. Impossible for Constance to believe that she was under the sway of passion, even of deep sentiment; if she had felt the tyranny of a fixed idea

she could not have been thus many-sided, thus light-hearted.

The lecturer of the day had taken her place at half-past three, and within five minutes had begun her paper, entitled "An Evil not without a Remedy."

Lawrence Garthe, ascending the steps of the house on Lexington Avenue twenty minutes later, was just about to press the button of the bell, when the door opened softly and invisibly, and he found himself unexpectedly entering a hall full of people. He had no time for choice, or he might have retreated. It was a crowd consisting chiefly of ladies, although here and there were to be seen persons of his own sex, each of whom turned towards him with a look of sensible relief as if rejoicing to see another man who must accept a share of the responsibility.

A feminine voice of rich sonorous quality was heard issuing from the main drawing-room. "You say gracefully, 'I have all the rights I want, I prefer to ask for privileges,—the precious privileges of safety, exclusion, care, tenderness, the sense of being considered by man a precious, a sacred thing.' Yes, that is charming; and no doubt the world is what we think it, and our part in existence is our own individual experience, our own individual consciousness. You, loving beauty and joyfulness, reverencing your own soul, faithful to deep and sacred emotions, rejecting every-

thing sordid, ugly, and inharmonious, may select out of your environment whatever gives permanence to the highest and best ideal.

"But there are half-fainting women and girls shut in close hideous rooms, toiling with needles, with scissors, with machines, with paste-pots, who have no power of selection or of choice. Think what your hours mean! music, art, literature, companionship, stimulus, sunshine, and fresh air; theirs!—let me give a few statistics:—

"Paper bag makers get from ten to fifteen cents a thousand bags; buttonhole makers, five, six, and seven cents for a dozen buttonholes; boys' trousers makers, thirty-five cents a dozen pairs; basters get thirty cents a dozen; finishers, from five to eight cents a garment of the kind which gives them a chance to finish four in a day."

"Is n't it horrible?" said a voice in Garthe's ear as he stood confounded. "I feel as if I should never dare to be happy again."

It was Kathy, and he looked at her with an odd mingling of sensations.

"Who is it speaking?" he asked.

"Miss Eugenia Shepard, the great humanitarian."

"I feel as if I had intruded where I had no right."

"Oh, it is only our Fin-de-Siècle Club," said Kathy. "We took it this time and asked Miss Shepard to speak. She is getting to be a great favorite. She gives one sensations."

"I do not belong to the club," said Garthe. "I will go away and come at some quieter time."

"Don't go away; I will find a quiet place for

you."

He had bent his ear to Kathy's lips; now, raising his head, he heard the words from within:—

- "And this meagre, hunger-bitten experience is no accident, no casual freak of fortune, but the condition of their lives from the cradle to the grave."
- "Come into the library," said Kathy, delighted with the opportunity. She stood, a slim figure in black, with her delicate face, and hair like an aureole, and beckoned; he followed.
- "I hope you believe in what she says," Kathy observed anxiously.
- "Believe! Who can help it?" said Garthe. "I wish to heaven I need not believe it. These horrible inequalities, these injustices to women, to children, to animals, to men even, strong and willing and eager for good, honest, faithful work, come over me so at times they threaten to drive me mad."
  - "It is all going to be cured," said Kathy.
- "Is it?" returned Garthe. They were standing together in the little alcove which led to the bay window in the library.
- "Yes," said Kathy, "just as soon as we have the suffrage."

Garthe did not answer; he was bending his head and listening.

- "Don't you believe in female suffrage?" inquired Kathy, feeling as if perhaps her enthusiasm might after all be a mere foolish truancy, and she had better run back to a safe place.
- "If you wish for it very much I shall not stand in your way," said Garthe, smiling, although his brow was still a little knitted.
- "But if we could make everything go right?" said Kathy eagerly.
- "Exactly, if you could make everything go right."
  - "Men are so bad" —
  - "I agree with you; we are abominable."
- "And it is so necessary to do something for those poor women who suffer with unchanging need, unchanging pain"—
- "Do all you can," said Garthe. He smiled at her, and indeed she possessed at the moment all the prettiness needed to cast a spell over a man. The speaker's voice penetrated even here.
- "Until he gives us what we want, let us consider him an enemy, with whom no terms can be made. Safety, peace? It is the safety of death, the peace of being nothing, of counting for nothing!"
- "What is it we must give you?" inquired Garthe.
- "Emancipation, the suffrage, equal wages, equal rights," said Kathy, herself a little puzzled and somewhat frightened at the thought of what might possibly be a conflict of duties.

"I remember hearing of this Miss Shepard. What sort of a woman is she?" inquired Garthe. "She has a fine voice."

"Not pretty, not well dressed," said Kathy, "but I admire her. I should like to resemble her exactly."

"Oh, no, I do not believe that."

"Come and be introduced to her."

"Not for worlds. She has just proclaimed me an enemy with whom no terms can be made."

"She does n't mean it," said Kathy consolingly. "She says sometimes that everything just at present is transitional, revolutionary. Of course, we cannot go on endlessly holding men to be enemies with whom we can have nothing to do. She has to say these things positively, but I don't think she altogether dislikes men. Indeed, Mr. Marchmont and she got on capitally, although he told her she reminded him of the Fat Boy in Pickwick, who went up to the old lady and said, 'I wants to make your flesh creep!' I wish you would come and be introduced presently."

"No, thank you. She has already made my flesh creep."

"And if Miss Shepard is a mere embodied intellect, as somebody called her, she has a friend, a beautiful widow, who is said to be very rich, who might fascinate you, a Mrs. Hernandez."

"Is she here?" he inquired, with evident surprise.

- "Do you know her, then?"
- "Hartley has spoken of her."
- "Does he know her?"
- "Very well indeed."
- "Oh!" said Kathy, with the true feminine eagerness to see the woman with whom a man she has known is ready to fall in love. "I must go and look at her again. Besides, I ought not to"—
- "Of course, go," said Garthe. "I will sit down quietly out of the way. Do not think of any responsibility towards me."
- "Presently there will be tea and chocolate; Constance will offer them here in the library."
  - "Where is she now?"
- "I do not know. If I happen to see her, I will tell her you are here."

Kathy, who had been conscious while she looked at Garthe and talked to him that she had not yet quite measured the gulf of strangeness between them, that she knew him less intimately than she had supposed, hurried away. "After all, I am rather afraid of him," she said to herself. He seemed too remote; too immovable. It was clear that Miss Shepard's challenge had roused feeling in him of some sort. "He looks as if he had been everywhere, to heaven and to hell," said Kathy. "I am a little in awe of him. I'm afraid I shall not always enjoy him." But all the same it flattered her instincts that she could make his face light up, that she could amuse him. "Of course,

I am not sublime," said poor little Kathy; "and I do not want to be sublime."

Garthe sat down in the alcove and waited. Miss Shepard's voice was no longer heard, but others were raised, some more harsh and shrill, and again low and even-toned. The discussion did not interest him, brought rather a sensation of skepticism, unreality, not of a real feeling which has gone through and through a life, coloring it indelibly. He forgot to listen, and his mind reverted to Constance, to the subtle significance of his having intruded here on this field-day. In the terrible game he had so far had to play with Fate, in which the everyday facts of life, the nature of things, had seemed to be on the other side, he was at last a winner. It suddenly occurred to him that, now that an irrepressible conflict between the sexes was being proclaimed, it might be the best thing he could do to stand up before these clever but inexperienced women, inspired by a longing for great achievement, likely to prove dangerous from their lack of self-knowledge and of humility before the elementary facts of human existence, tell them a man's side of the story, and let them take issue on the right and wrong of his own vexatious wrestle with destiny. They were talking about victims who felt the fetters upon them, whose lives were the lives of captives without hope of release. He, too, knew something of what it is to struggle against everything and everybody for

his daily existence; to be conquered and have to reconquer; to bear himself through the difficulties of a false position with a feeling of earrying about with him an omnipresent lie which took the worth out of his every effort, which oppressed, burdened, and tainted even the love he felt for Constance. Then he smiled at the impulse. Somehow, he had to free his heart from its burden; somehow, he had to meet inflexible reality and look it in the face, - but not here, not now, not today.

The odor of violets crossed him. He had sent a box to Constance that morning. He rose and advanced to the curtain of the alcove. She had entered the room, - she was directing the men at the tea-table.

"Let me help you in some way," he said, approaching her.

He was struck by the look in her eyes as she raised them; of sustained expectation which the event of his coming answered. He did not offer to shake hands with her.

"Did you know I was here?" he asked.

"No." She was not in the least degree embarrassed: what she felt instead was an irresistible sense of joy in his glance; in the ease and directness with which he approached her.

"You have to make tea for all these people?" he asked, indicating the equipage.

"I shall sit down and make tea within the limits

of my teapot," she returned, smiling as their eyes met. "Meantime, the men will offer tea and chocolate which somebody else has made."

"Please make me a cup," he said. He was struck, as he had never been struck before, by her beauty; by her brilliant eyes, the clear pallor of her skin, the rich color of her lips. On her side, she experienced an added sense of the calm dignity, the repose, of his face and manner; to-day, even more than yesterday, she was conscious of his love being something absolute and real.

"I ought not to be here, I suppose," he now observed. "I am not a Fin-de-Siècle. Why did you not tell me last night you were to have this assemblage of people to-day?"

"I did not think of it."

"But you expected me?"

"Yes," she said; the dimple showed in her cheek. She had taken her seat at the table before the urn, her side-face towards the door, where there were groups of people constantly changing. He stood at her left, with his back to them.

"Have you been thinking about me?" he asked.

"A little."

"I knew, the moment I saw you," he said triumphantly, "that you had thought of me a great deal. You have even grown to care a trifle more for me than you did last night."

She did not answer.

"If everything were simple and easy," he went

on, "if I had nothing to conquer, nothing to thrust aside, if I could freely put out my hand and clasp yours, I should be afraid of my happiness. blamed myself after I had gone away last night."

She looked towards him eagerly. He continued: --

- "I said to myself, 'She does not know me yet." She smiled.
- "I suppose I know you as well as you know me," she murmured.
- "No. You can have little idea of me. I have much in my experience you will not like. Life has been for me no smooth and easy road. I have all sorts of elements in me, some fierce. Yet, when I tell you my history, you will feel for me, you will feel with me. There is nothing you cannot sympathize with, not to say forgive."

Her eyes were raised to his. An intense surge of color swept over her face.

- "I am sure of it," she said simply.
- "You are not afraid?"
- "No. I am not afraid."

He loved her for her courage, her decision; but all the more he sighed.

"You know," he said in a different tone, "that I have a little boy seven years old."

Her lips and her eyelids quivered; again a blush rose to her cheeks, this time soft and rosy. "Yes," she said shyly; then raising her eyes she asked gently, "What is his name?"

"The same as mine. Do you know that?"

"Lawrence." He could see her lips form the word, although no sound issued from them. He gave a little sigh as of relief, of ineffable content. There came into his heart as he looked down at the girl an indescribable, an almost infinite sense of salvation, of peace; a new future lay before him, glorious in the light of heaven.

Mr. Marchmont, who had entered the room with Mrs. Challoner, stood watching the two with a half smile. The club was breaking up; the members, telling each other how many engagements still unaccomplished must be fulfilled before dinner, were hurrying away, the impression of the lecture they had just listened to already blurred by the thought of what was to follow.

"Go and tell Constance she ought to come and say good-by to Miss Shepard," said Mrs. Challoner; and Mr. Marchmont, with a look of inscrutable self-possession, advanced very slowly, so slowly that his approach was hardly apparent. It seemed to him such a pity to interrupt the conversation. Jealousy had tormented him sorely where Garthe was concerned; but since last evening he had enjoyed some peace of mind, and now to see the young fellow absorbed in Constance and absorbing her, was something to be devoutly thankful for. Hence, he was so excessively deliberate that Mrs. Challoner herself overtook him, and carried Constance the news that Miss Shepard had gone.

"She could not wait to bid you good-by," said Mrs. Challoner. "She had to be at the guild by five o'clock, and it was already late. She was sorry not to see you, and so was Mrs. Hernandez. Beautiful woman, is n't she? and what a contrast to Miss Shepard!"

"I suppose Miss Shepard takes the beautiful widow round that she may touch the hearts and intellects she herself cannot reach."

"That is, the men's," said Mrs. Challoner.
"Did she convert you to Woman's Rights?"

"I did not need to be converted," said Mr. Marchmont. "I believe devoutly in Woman's Rights already."

"What sort of rights?" said Mrs. Challoner suspiciously.

"All sorts of rights, whatever you set your minds on. I want you all to do whatever you choose. Of course," Mr. Marchmont added mournfully, with a little glance at Garthe, "we should like to have a little liberty left, but it's no great matter, and we don't deserve it."

"No, indeed," said Garthe cordially.

"Oh, just as soon as men concede things in that tone," said Mrs. Challoner scornfully, "we don't care about having any rights at all; rather prefer not to have any."

## CHAPTER X.

#### AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

EVEN when Mrs. Hernandez thought with her on certain questions, Eugenia was often inclined to repudiate such fellowship, since the other was sure to have attained such results after starting from different premises and working through an opposite line of conclusions. Eugenia, for example, after years of self-suppression, of sacrifice, of a sense of revolt against the sufferings of others, which she could never have experienced for her own wrongs, had prayerfully attained the conclusive belief that a woman must at times be a law unto herself, a conviction which Mrs. Hernandez had reached by a single bound away from any duties and obligations which hindered her free play. Eugenia was dissatisfied with the condition of things, not for herself, because she never thought of herself, but for her sex, for the pure and proud who suffered, for the half lost who might be redeemed, and for the eleven thousand modern virgins who longed to set forth on a crusade. Mrs. Hernandez had pondered her own situation, coolly and critically, contrasted it with that of any man with whom she came in contact,

had weighed herself, as it were, against him, and decided on his vulnerable point. Both were in accord in not having absolutely defined what was needed in the way of a happy solution of the problem offered to the modern woman; thus there was some room for discussion.

"Women can never be anything in particular," Bella observed one day, shortly after the meeting of the Fin-de-Siècle Club, "because each one is always thinking about some man. Either she is in love with him and deadly sentimental, longing to write to him, to see him, to please him, to cook his meals, and earry his bag like a squaw, to do him good and reform him, to get money out of him, or else she hates him and spends all her time thinking of his sins, of his vices, his cruelty, his selfishness, his brutality."

"I deny it," said Eugenia forcibly. "Look at me! What man am I thinking about?"

"The man who never came, — the man you long to look up to and can't, — the man you have dreamed of and idealized for twenty years, and who makes you hate the men you have seen because they are not like him."

"Never," cried Eugenia, enraged, wounded at her tenderest point, "did I hear any one, man or woman, utter such abject nonsense."

Bella laughed.

"I simply judge other women by myself," she observed. "I am constantly thinking now-a-days

about Ferdinand Hartley. Shall I let it go on, or shall I not let it go on? What do you think?"

"Do you love him?"

- "I—love—him!" repeated Bella with scorn.
  "I hope I have passed through that phase,—I hope I am no longer a sentimental girl. I am twenty-nine years old; I know what moves me and I know what bores me. I know what is worth my while and I know what is not worth my while. I have arrived."
- "Perhaps what I ought to have asked, is whether you believe Mr. Hartley will wash."
- "No, I do not. I'll say that frankly. But then so few things will keep their original color and size through hard usage. There is a terrible fading and shrinking. He is good-looking; I like his manner, I like the way he meets people, the way he enters a room and takes leave. He knows how to do all those things which still trouble me."
- "Will you permit me to inquire whether you consider him to be in love with you?"
- "A man may be in love. Deliver me from a cynical man. Yes, Ferdinand is a little in love with me," said Bella complacently. "I can make him, if I choose, furiously in love. I hate demonstrative lovers when I am not in the mood for them."
- "Don't you think it possible he may be after your money?"
  - "I know very well he is after my money. I

have no particular objection to his being after my money, - what I should like to be sure of is that, in marrying him, I should get the worth of my money." She suddenly broke off with an impatient gesture. "One gets the worth of nothing in this world," she said with a note of bitter feeling in her voice.

Eugenia was well habituated to these sudden fits of depression which seemed to come and go without logic or reason, alternating with the most unreasonable high spirits.

- "If you take my advice," she began, then hesitated.
  - "Well, what is your advice?"
- "You will marry some one. I do not consider Mr. Hartley clever or wise or especially highminded, but I fancy his worst faults are vanity and love of ease and luxury. He seems to me safer perhaps from his very limitations. Married to him, your social career might be assured, and I think you would be more happy, more contented."
- "Happier! more contented!" said Bella. could n't be happy, - I could n't be contented. There is a push in me away from the possibility of happiness and contentment. I need movement; I need some excitement to satisfy something in me that is like an aching thirst."
  - "You think about yourself too much."
- "Don't you know that a woman is herself, that she can be nothing but herself? You talk as if I could make myself over!"

"So you can," said Eugenia coolly. "Stop thinking about yourself, even for one day. Go into the street, any street in this city, in any city, and think about the unhappy-looking women you meet; follow them home and find out something about their lives, and understanding their case you will get a new idea about what trouble is, and you may be ready to reflect upon your own singular good fortune."

"Do you suppose then that I have never suffered?"

"You have not suffered enough to find out that you must submit, — that you must accept the decline of every wish just as you accept the fact of the setting of the sun. That is the lesson of suffering which mortals have to learn."

"But — when I suffer I long to hurt somebody," said Bella. She spoke carelessly. "It is you who have no idea of what suffering means. It teaches one fierceness, it teaches one cruelty, it teaches one hatred. But you know nothing of that side of life. You are an odd compound, Eugenia, — all theory, no practice. I don't suppose you ever in all your life had an offer of marriage."

"No," returned Eugenia with some grimness. "I belong, I suppose, to what is called 'the third sex.' I have not taken up fancy-work as an alternative to falling in love, nor falling in love as an alternative to fancy-work. But I have had my share of the wear and tear of life."

Bella had been reclining on the sofa, but now started up and began to move about restlessly. "When you address a room full of women," she now said abruptly, "you do not tell them to submit to suffering, to injustice, to learn lessons from failure. You tell them to revolt."

Eugenia's brow had knitted, and she rubbed the furrows with her hand. "Yes, I am inconsistent," she said. "It is only when I am worked up, when my brain is heated by the sight of the unequally distributed wealth, the unequally distributed happiness, the unequally distributed misery in the world, that I can be wholly a reformer, — that I long to tear down and build up anew."

"If I had accepted my life," proceeded Bella, still thoughtful, "if I had submitted to what I did not like, denied myself reasonable ambitions, and tried to satisfy people, I should not be here to-day, an independent, rich woman; neither would you be having your present promising career."

"Well, who knows?" said Eugenia.

"But with me," Bella went on, "every single effort has been a means to an end. I have taken old-fashioned conventions and cut them to ribbons; but I did not do it for the sake of my sex, I did it for myself,—I was bound to have a life of my own, a career of my own. Not that when I began I had even the dimmest presentiment of what was in store for me. I only saw a little way ahead, but I saw that very clearly, and anything that

hindered me — I trod it under foot,"— she stamped softly on the rug. "If I had an impulse I did not waste it in small change, as it were. I acted on it on the moment; I frittered neither time nor strength away in talk. Why do you look at me in that way, Eugenia?"

If Miss Shepard had answered as she felt, she would have said that Mrs. Hernandez's face, gesture, and movement gave her a painful sense of the savagery of the woman. What she said was:—

"I hope you are not posing as the typical modern woman."

"Well, why not?" said Bella, laughing. "If I do not lose myself in the cause as you do, it is because I have been through everything, I have tested everything, and I know that what you are all striving for as a great end will not be worth having after you get it."

"You seem to predict success for us."

"Oh, yes, success, — what you now call success. A man can always be beaten by a woman, and what one woman can effect against one man, a thousand women can effect against a thousand men. But you cannot alter the facts of things. Marriage is the only career, the only profession, worth a woman's having, — and that brings me round again to the question whether I shall marry Ferdinand Hartley." She paused before a mirror. "Sometimes," she observed, "when I have been thinking about myself past, present, and to come, I am frankly amazed to see how young I am still."

Even the cold Eugenia looked at her with admiration. Her eyes sparkled,—the curve of her lips was full of disdain and mischief.

"I'm not thirty yet," she said, "and how much has happened to me!" She uttered this in a tone as of soliloquy, then laughed outright as if some thought amused her. She glanced back at Eugenia. "What was it Mr. Hartley was quoting about the desirable existence,—to be a woman until thirty, a soldier till fifty, and a monk the rest of one's life? You observe that gives a woman no chance after the age of thirty."

"Somebody else said, 'A woman is adored until she is thirty, after that she adores.'"

Bella repeated this twice over as if trying to test the truth of it.

"Now I should have said," she observed presently, "that most women began by adoring and later found out that it was more profitable to be adored."

It sometimes seemed to Eugenia that Bella's unchecked sweep of thought took erratic curves towards the wide horizons of truth; then again there was this jar, this dissonance with her own belief. But perhaps, she said to herself, if Bella's frankness were sometimes a little brutal, did it not come from a resolution to utter the worst that was in her, to disarm judgment by giving her least opinion a stamp and an edge of individuality? These contradictions in her yawned wide enough to admit all

sorts of free play of contrasting elements of character. In general, she liked refinement, and to push her love of luxury to its limit; but then she could discard good taste and show a hearty contempt for high civilization. Habitually good-natured, she could put on roughness, and although she usually liked to be generous with her money she alternated between a meaningless profusion and a niggardly grip of her purse which had more than once put Miss Shepard to the blush.

By this time Hartley had intrenched himself in the position of Mrs. Hernandez's friend, philosopher, and guide, and he had besides made a powerful auxiliary of his sister, Mrs. Barry, and had pressed her into the service. Mrs. Barry was a bright, pretty woman, enamored of the pleasantness of life, and, although almost completely wrapped up in her. husband and children, was still ready to sacrifice herself in her brother's behalf and help on his interests. She flattered Bella and she liked Eugenia heartily. In return Eugenia considered her frivolous, and Bella studied her coolly and critically, trying to get at the secret of a certain ease and natural nonchalance that she possessed in common with her brother, and which enabled her to find the comfortable side of things.

"How do you like her?" Hartley asked his sister after she had met Mrs. Hernandez twice.

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<sup>&</sup>quot;I quite admire her," said Mrs. Barry discreetly.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Really?"

- "Yes, really. Perhaps I ought to confess that there is something in her at times a little fierce, something indefinably different from other people, which chills affection."
- "But do you think she is socially acceptable, is she presentable?"
- "As Mrs. Ferdinand Hartley? Yes; only, if she becomes Mrs. Ferdinand Hartley, I advise you to look out for yourself."
  - "What do you mean?"
- "It seems to me there is a dangerous side to her."

Hartley delared that he liked this piquancy, this distinct note of individuality. What he had wanted was the mere conventional verdict of a woman who had a quick eye for the desirable or undesirable characteristics of a member of her sex. not need the warning. At times he was ready to pique himself on his intimate knowledge of the real Bella Hernandez, then a chance word, look, or action seem to put a chasm between them which he knew not how to bridge over. At such times she seemed to him a being of sensations, sympathies, experiences, and ambitions utterly alien to his own, and he found himself tormented and out of heart for the enterprise. Then when her mood had passed, his repugnance vanished as well, and he could condone the action or expression which had displeased him, accepting it as a child's mischieyous freak, or perhaps the test a coquettish woman

appointed to try his affection. Another trait in Bella he found inconsistent and incomprehensible was the pushing to extremes her resolution to be chaperoned at all times and all seasons. He had actually, so far, never seen her alone; Miss Shepard was invariably with her if she received him; if the companion happened to be absent she declined to receive visitors. Whether Mrs. Hernandez was afraid of him or afraid of herself; whether, penetrating his motives, she thus fenced herself with precautions; or whether she desired to keep him at arm's length, testing him thoroughly before admitting him to the privileges of an accepted suitor, he could not decide. And it may be confessed that until some little time had passed, he had been very well contented to be held in check by the presence of Miss Shepard, who, with some happy dexterity, seemed to see without seeing, and hear without hearing, as unconscious as the Dresden china figures on the mantelpiece. There was perhaps an added zest in thus making love, stopping short just when the situation became dangerous, pulling one's self up on the brink. Each understood the situation, and each had the wit and the audacity to play with the advantages it presented.

Still, Hartley was by this time inclined to push his advantages to the utmost, and he schemed a little for a private interview. He liked Eugenia, and he believed, too, that she was an ally and not an enemy. Yet a man cannot make love to two

women at once, and in the moment that he speaks with eloquence, with strong persuasion, and to the heart, he prefers a single ear.

One evening just before Lent, Mrs. Barry had invited her brother and Mrs. Hernandez to dine with her and later to accompany her to the opera. Bella had at first declined, saying that she never went out without Miss Shepard, and that Miss Shepard was not only not invited but had an engagement which would keep her away until This evasion was so derided, so eight o'clock. ignored by Mrs. Barry, who possessed a fair share of woman's wit, that Bella gave way almost against her will and found herself, at seven o'clock, sitting down at Mrs. Barry's table, and, three quarters of an hour later, on her way to the opera-house. She had been quiet through the meal, but Mr. Barry, his wife, and Hartley had made up for her silence by a lively dialogue, easy, intimate, illustrated by little incidents recounted in a lively way and set off with piquant descriptions. The mind they were addressing was, however, of a different order from their own. Their statement of a ease was at once too clear and not clear enough; the arguments they advanced were suggested, not defined; they permitted too much to go without saying, and did not attempt to explain obvious truths to suit the mind of their hearer. Thus Bella, startled, perplexed at their saying often exactly the opposite of what they thought, their affectation of

indifference for what she knew they liked, their quick vivid descriptions of what was going on in a world which she neither knew by experience nor correctly realized in her imagination, felt herself eclipsed, set aside, her claims almost derided. seemed to her that Mrs. Barry was talking of nothing but the honors she received; she imagined that Hartley was endeavoring to show her that he had other acquaintances more charming than herself; the suspicion tormented her that they more than once wittily alluded to events in her own secret history, which they had contrived to find out. Then, too, she was vexed with herself for being dull and heavy, devoid of charm, showing at every stage of the meal some lack of knowledge, and, however she might vaunt her own superior beauty, wealth, elegance, feeling inferior to Mrs. Barry, who when complimented on her new gown declared that she had made it herself out of two old ones, and that no dressmaker had even touched it.

In fact, living easily with people, entering into their tone, accepting what they say at its just value, and expressing one's self with sincerity and without too much emphasis, is one of the final results of culture, and Bella had not attained it. To his astonishment, Hartley soon found that she was not only out of spirits, but out of temper.

"What is it?" he contrived to say to her, as he was conducting her to the carriage. "I am afraid

we bored you. When Edna and I are together we are in such spirits."

"It seemed to me," she said with a sort of defiance in her tone, "that you were laughing at me."

"Laughing at you!" said Hartley incredulously. "When all that Edna longed to do was to please you, to make you feel that you were among friends! And I — Bella, do you know me so little as not to realize that I only wish to show you my heart?"

He pressed her hand to his side. Her tone had alarmed him.

"Sometimes," she said, "I feel so lonely; I miss Eugenia."

"I wish I could be something to you," said Hartley with real fervor. "I had hoped you were beginning to like me a little."

He was putting her into the carriage. It seemed to him that she returned the pressure of his hand, and it reassured him slightly, but he did not again forget his rôle. Sitting opposite her in the carriage, he kept his eyes fixed on her face, hardly speaking except in monosyllables.

Although Bella's predominant sentiment had been anger, an anger which included not only Mr. and Mrs. Barry, but Hartley, it was a fictitious feeling, and came not so much from a dislike of being rivaled and surpassed as from a sort of timidity, a sensation of being cramped in this secondary place she was obliged to take.

- "Stay near me," she said to Hartley as they entered the box,
- "That is what I wish to do. I desire nothing else," he said.

He could see that she was not at her ease, that she looked at the women in the boxes about her with curiosity, yet with a self-consciousness which left her awkward and restless. The hum of voices, the salutations, the easy gliding of men from box to box, the intimate air of the groups who met and exchanged a word, perhaps made her feel as if she had invaded a world in which she had no real footing. She became sensible that lorgnettes were leveled at her.

- "Do you observe how people are looking at you?" Hartley asked her, leaning forward.
- "Why should they look at me?" she asked uneasily.
- "You are a stranger, or comparatively so. They have heard of you and are curious to see you."
- "I wish they would not. I do not feel sure of myself to-night."
- "You are in superb good looks, and your gown is magnificent."
- "But these women are so splendidly dressed! See those diamonds."
- "No handsomer than yours, and yours help to set off beauty and youth, not ugliness and decay."

Under the influence of these flatteries, Bella's

self-possession revived slightly. She began to be accustomed to the brilliance, the sparkle, the subdued excitement and sense of expectation. The first notes of the overture created a diversion. and she could give her eyes to the stage. opera was Wagner's Walküre, and for a time she seemed, much to Hartley's relief, to be interested in the thickly gathering crowd of impressions of the story. She kept her eyes on the performers until the curtain fell, then plied Hartley, who leaned forward, eager for her least word, with questions concerning the plot. It would have been impossible for him to have described his evening as one full of enjoyment; still at every sign of complacency on her part he experienced an indescribable sense of joyful relief. He had become accustomed to the thought that he could marry Bella if he wished, and he had suddenly discovered, now that she frowned for a moment, that he desired it with all his heart and soul, that his life had narrowed down to that one single ambition. Not that he was in love, not that he was under any illusions as to the sort of life in store for him if he won her; living for a round of occupations, dissipations, and amusements which brought with them, not stimulus, but a sense of weariness, skepticism, uselessness; of luxury for the sake of luxury, of self-indulgence for the sake of self-indulgence; never really belonging to that more exclusive world which he might deride if he

were in it, but when barred out by any cause making a fetish of it.

This background of his thoughts did not disturb his clear resolution to say something to Bella, before he slept that night, which should fix himself in her mind and heart and decide his future. How to say it, whether with overmastering passion, whether with coolness and courage, giving a humorous touch to the situation, or whether to trust his declaration to the chapter of chances and let it utter itself, he was not yet quite sure.

He was reflecting that he still had the whole last act of the opera in which to make up his mind, when he was all at once startled by Mrs. Hernandez' saying to him in a whisper:—

"I want to go home."

"To go home?" he repeated. "Are you ill?"

"No, no. Get me a carriage and send me home," said Bella restlessly. "I am tired of it." The act was finishing,—there was a little stir all over the house, and she, with others, rose to her feet.

"Are you going to take a turn in the lobby?" asked Mrs. Barry.

"No, I am going home," said Bella. "Your brother will find a carriage and put me in it. Then he can come back to you."

Mrs. Barry looked archly from one to the other. "I am very sorry," she said. "The last act is very beautiful. But after all, it is long, and I can see, Mrs. Hernandez, you look tired."

"I have a headache, — the lights tire me."

"Ferdy will take good care of you," said Mrs. Barry. "He need not come back. Edward is here somewhere, and he will look after me."

She gave a knowing little nod as she met her brother's eyes, and he smiled. Although he had been startled by his companion's sudden whim, nothing could have suited him better than the way things had fallen out. He found Bella's outside garment, wrapped it about her with an air of devout homage, and offered his arm. The stairways were full of people, and twenty men took occasion to salute him with a smiling empressement. His companion was frankly stared at by some of the women who had come out for a breath of air. Her cloak of white moire and angora, and the scarf of rich lace around her head, became her. She walked with grace, seeming quite indifferent to the groups; Hartley could see that she roused curiosity and admiration.

"Six months, a year hence," he whispered, "you will be the centre of attraction in a place like this. You are making a sensation."

"I only wish to get away," she replied.

They paused in the vestibule.

"You did not enjoy the opera."

"No. I am sorry to rob you of the last act. You can get me a carriage and go back to your sister."

He smiled and slightly pressed the hand on his arm against his side.

"The heat and lights were too much for you," he said.

She drew a long breath. "I hated it,—I loathed it," she said fervently, although in a voice little above a whisper.

"So did I."

"No, not as I did. You did not feel, like me, as if the people belonged to one world and I to another, — as if they were crowding me out."

- "You were fanciful. They are all ready to bow down and worship you. There is nobody who will not admire you. They are actually very goodnatured, most of them a little dull and heavy, yet with a longing to seem to get more out of their life than their neighbors, although each is thinking about himself or herself: of his tight boots that pinch him, of the torn lace on her gown, can it be mended? or that another toilette although simpler has more *chic* than her own, or that the man she longs to monopolize is with the especial group of people she hates. They are all occupied with themselves; they think no more of you and me than of the painted figures in the frescoes."
- "But they stared so, I knew not which way to look."
- "I can forgive them for looking at you. I looked."
- "I saw one woman, —I know who she is, a Mrs. Garner, smile as she glanced at us both."
  - "She is always smiling. It becomes her."

"Did you ever see a ghost?" inquired Bella with a little shiver.

"Nobody ever sees ghosts unless he believes in them, and I only believe in the world of flesh and blood," said Hartley soothingly. "You are a little nervous to-night. Forget it all."

Gradually, under the influence of his glance, his touch, his good-humor, the imperious self-willed personality of the woman beside him began to be melted. She leaned towards him confidingly. They were waiting for their carriage, expecting each moment to hear the number called. The wind blew cruelly where they stood, near the open door of the lobby. Suddenly she turned and clung to him, hiding her face against his shoulder, as a gust swept across them.

"You will be frozen," said Hartley. "I will go and see what causes this delay."

"No, no, no," she returned. "Do not leave me."

He could feel that she was trembling from head to foot. Just at that instant a familiar figure passed them.

"Lawrence," said Hartley, "how are you? Could you spare a moment to look after my carriage? Number one hundred and forty-five."

It was called while he was speaking.

"Bitterly cold," said Garthe, glancing towards the muffled figure beside Hartley. "It feels like more snow." "I hope not. It is an abominable winter. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm well."

Garthe glanced again at the woman who had so concealed her face that he could gain no impression of her identity, then raised his hat and reentered the opera-house.

It seemed to Hartley, as he led Bella down the steps, that she tottered. The man holding the door open had to help her into the carriage, and she sank down shapelessly in the corner.

"You are frozen," said Hartley.

"Yes, frozen stiff," she answered with a little laugh. He could hear her teeth chatter.

There was an appeal in her whole manner, if not to his tenderness, at least to his sympathy. He folded her wraps about her more closely; his arm encircled her, as he took her hands and warmed them within his own. Then, conscious of not meeting a rebuff, although he was equally conscious that she held out no invitation, and had simply permitted his show of affectionate concern, he ventured, very gently, to draw her closer to him; he pressed her head against his shoulder.

She yielded for a moment in silence, then asked, with a half laugh: —

"Are you in love with me?"

"Surely you do not doubt it, Bella."

"I doubt most things to-night."

"Then all the more you might believe in me."

"Better save your love-making for a more auspicious time. Can't you see that I am in a rage?"

"With me?" asked Hartley, completely staggered by her tone and manner, by such jarring dissonance with his own mood.

"No, not with you, except that you belong to the human race."

The carriage stopped. They had reached the Percy. The door was opened, and in another moment they were inside the warmed and lighted vestibule. He looked at her in doubt, not certain whether he ought to take leave, resigning his coveted opportunity without having pressed it to a conclusion, or to be tenacious of his privileges, as a man should.

She saw that he paused in doubt.

"Oh! do not go yet," she said indifferently.
"I suppose Eugenia will be waiting for us."

Her tone vexed him; her look cut his vanity to the quick; it robbed him of all dignity. Still, he followed her obediently up the broad shallow stairs, preceded by a servant who opened the door and turned up the lights in the empty room, and made the fire blaze more brightly. By the time the attendant had acquitted himself of these duties, Bella had in a measure conquered her irritation, or perhaps, finding herself among her familiar surroundings, she had regained her sense of her own identity; had lost her feeling of diminished privilege.

She sat down on her favorite sofa, flung back her ermine-lined mantle with its edge of long silky angora fur, took off the lace scarf from her hair, and emerged from this chrysalis, smiling. A close observer would have seen, nevertheless, that her lower lip still trembled.

"I don't know what you must think of me," she said.

"That you are the most beautiful of women,—that is what I think," returned Hartley, who had planted himself before her. "If you were not at times a trifle incomprehensible, you would not, I suppose, be a woman, but an angel."

"Oh, I'm no angel," said Bella. "You may as well understand that. I do not even want to be an angel." She shivered as she spoke, or Hartley might have suggested that there are two kinds of angels. But she spoke in an odd voice; something in her look and manner appealed to him afresh. It almost suggested an overcharged heart yearning to pour itself out in intimate confidence.

He took her hand.

"I wish you would tell me what has happened to disturb you?" he said earnestly. "If any man in the world can be your friend, I am that man. You might better trust me entirely than torture me by half allusions."

"You say you are my friend?" she said with her mocking, tantalizing smile.

"I am your devoted friend."

- "What would you do for me?"
  - "Anything that man ean do."
- "That is a large promise," she said, with the same mocking, tantalizing manner. "I might put your friendship to some terrible test."
- "You will find me faithful," said Hartley, going over in his mind all her singularities of behavior and wondering to what crimes he was pledging himself. Perhaps she detected this arrière-pensée, for she laughed.
- "I don't ask anything tragical," she said lightly. "I should simply like to feel that a man loved me enough to be true to me through evil report and good report, to me; not the rich Mrs. Hernandez, but Bella Brown, the real woman. But I suppose it is more than I have a right to ask."

He bent his full gaze upon her. "No," he said with emphasis.

"Sometimes," she said, "I feel as if I were losing my nerve. For one thing, I have grown to depend upon Eugenia. I can't live alone. I have a horror of being alone. At the opera-house it seemed to me I was a target; as if from all sides came glances, whispers, questions, comments." She shivered as she spoke.

He was still holding her hand. He came closer, but with a sudden coquettish gesture she released herself from his clasp, and moved to the end of the sofa.

"Tell me something," she said, with imperiousness.

- "Anything."
- "Who was the man to whom you spoke on the steps of the opera-house?"
  - "Lawrence Garthe, a cousin of mine."
  - "A cousin of yours? How very odd!"

Her face had changed. Her eyes were intensely bright, and on each cheek was a spot of fiery color.

- "It is not a close relationship. His father and my father were cousins, but we were thrown together as children, and have always known each other well. But why is it odd? Are you acquainted with him?"
- "I have seen him, and I have heard a great deal about him," said Bella. "How does he happen to be here in New York?"
  - "He lives here."
- "Lives here in New York?" she exclaimed incredulously.

Hartley gazed at her in astonishment. She seemed laboring under some intense feeling; her face was full of color and animation; she moved her hands, her arms, her feet, her whole figure, and in her look, attitude, and gestures, there was the suggestion of something cruel, something menacing.

"Why, what do you know about Garthe?" he exclaimed, recalling his conversation with his cousin and his effort to elicit some information regarding Mrs. Hernandez. His mind reverted to Lawrence's feeling of dislike and antagonism towards the late Aurelio, but anything he could

conjecture concerning the relations of the two men seemed inadequate to account for Bella's excitement.

However, as Hartley bent his deep, penetrating look upon her she became conscious that she was betraying too much and rousing his euriosity, and gave a little shrug. "What should I know about him, except that he used to be considered a wonderful expert in mineralogy," she said, laughing. "Men used to carry bits of ore and gravel to him, trembling in their boots, for he could tell them whether they had got hold of a big bonanza or a beggarly claim that wouldn't pay for the panning out. He could run up mining stocks to three hundred in a day simply by raising his finger, or knock the bottom out of them by shaking his head, so that they fell below zero, as if a blizzard had come down from Manitoba."

- "Yes," said Hartley thoughtfully. "I know he is a first-class scientific man."
- "Oh, yes, a first-class scientific man, but too good for this world," she said in an ironic tone.
  - "Was he married when you knew him?"
- "Married?" she repeated as if incredulous. "Did he ever condescend to marry a mortal woman?"
- "He married shortly after he went West. We were taken by surprise, he seemed the last man I knew to marry in such haste."
  - "Did he marry in haste to repent at leisure?"

- "His wife died in a year or two."
- "Died? Did she die, poor thing?" said Bella in a tone of deep commiseration. "And married to a man like Lawrence Garthe? What a pity!"
- "I am sorry you do not seem to fancy my cousin Lawrence."
  - "Do you?" she asked dryly.
- "I like him particularly. I never had a brother, and he has been more like a brother to me than any man alive. As little fellows we used to visit together at my grandmother's in the summer, and that sort of intimacy sticks to one. After one is grown up it is not so easy a matter to get up friendship,—one has not the requisite impetus; one has not the same amount of unexpended feeling." Hartley spoke with animation; her half-expressed scorn of Garthe had roused all his combativeness. "When I am with Lawrence," he went on, "I always wish I were that sort of man; then when I come away, I think with some relief that after all it is not in me to be that sort of man."
- "But why should you, of all men, envy him?" she demanded.
- "He is so honest, so thorough; he finds so many things interesting outside of himself and his own selfish ambitions. He loves hard work,—shirks nothing; the fiercer the tug the more faithful he is, when he has an object in view."

She curled her lip.

"It sounds like a description of a safe old slow coach"—

"If he is slow, he is sure," said Hartley, coerced by masculine instinct, besides family affection, to stand by a man towards whom she exhibited an antagonism, even a disdain, which vexed him. "He has been, in his own line, a very successful man, and without ever having made money his prime object, he is almost rich."

"Rich!" she exclaimed incredulously. "Rich," she repeated scornfully. "I should like to hear

what you call rich."

"Well, perhaps by your estimate of things he is not rich, — he is certainly not a millionaire."

"But fairly well off, -comfortable?"

"Fairly well off; comfortable."

She was silent for a moment, and again he had the impression of cruel forces in reserve, as if she were gathering them for a spring. But with her elastic change of mood she rallied, and laughed, although there was no laughter in her eyes.

"He lost his wife, you say," she said with that

ironical face.

"Years ago."

"He has not married again?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet; you speak as if he were likely to marry soon."

Hartley laughed low. "I am not in his secrets."

"But you meant something by that 'Not yet."

"I suspect that he is in love. I have no right to say it, but as I happen to have introduced him to a very charming friend of mine"— "You introduced him to a charming friend of yours?" she repeated eagerly. "And he has fallen in love with her?"

"Garthe is not the man to discuss his private affairs. He has hardly ever spoken about his first wife to me."

"His first wife? Do men ever enjoy talking about their early mistakes? It is the second wife who is interesting. Tell me about her."

Impelled by his love of holding his own, yet withheld by the restlessness and fierceness in Bella, which suggested the chafing of a leopardess, he tried to content her with some vague general outlines of the history of Garthe's acquaintance with the Garners. But with a child's obstinate pertinacity she pressed question upon question until she had elicited not only all that Hartley could veraciously impart, but a great deal that, with his loose hold upon facts, he permitted to escape him, yet could not youch for.

- "Mrs. Garner! The one who looked at me to-night. How long since her husband died?"
  - "More than four years."
  - "She looks very young."
  - "She is twenty-eight."
- "Twenty-eight, and looks eighteen! I should like to know her secret. I wish you could tell me what she uses for her complexion."
- "Both you and Mrs. Garner may dispense with fictitious aids to beauty for some thirty years to come."

- "And he is in love with her! But no wonder."
- "He has not told me he is in love with her, but he goes there constantly. And he ought to marry. He owes it to his child to marry."
- "He has a child, then?" she said in a low, clear voice.
- "A fine little lad of seven or so. Lawrence worships him."
- "Rich, well placed in the world, a fine boy he is devoted to, a beautiful second wife in store for him! No wonder you call him a successful man! The universal human plague of defeat and failure evidently does not touch him."

Hartley put on an air of impassiveness.

- " I'm sorry you dislike my cousin Lawrence," he said.
- "Dislike him?" she repeated, raising her eyes to his and smiling. "Do you want me to like him? Do you want me to fall in love with him?"

He was glad of this appeal to his jealousy; he had felt the double sting of her injustice to Garthe and of her display of more passionate feeling in her scorn and aversion than he, Hartley, had been able to inspire in the way of love for himself. Thus he was, to a degree, pacified by her tone and look.

- "They say," he remarked easily, "that a man only hates the woman he has once loved overmuch, and that a woman only hates the man who has not loved her."
- "I hate nobody," she said, with a little yawn behind her hand.

Hartley, who had for some time been leaning on the back of the armchair in front of the sofa, started up.

"I had forgotten it was so late," he said. "I must go. I am glad to carry away your confession that you hate nobody. Still, negations are not enough for me. I want you to confess that you love somebody!"

He did not, however, dally with the possibilities of his suggestion. She, too, had risen; he again took her hand, stooped, laid his lips to it, gave her a smiling glance, and went out.

## CHAPTER XI.

## BELLA'S STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

LEFT alone, Bella stood for a few moments without moving from her place, her eyes fixed on the door which had closed after Hartley, her features changing gradually from their look of coquetry and animation to one of deep reverie.

"I thought," she murmured after a time, "that he was on the other side of the world." An audible exclamation escaped her and she shuddered. "I might have met him anywhere, at any time, in the street, in a roomful of people!"

She shrank anew with the same impulse she had experienced at the opera-house, longing to hide herself, to flee to the ends of the earth, to do anything at any price, at any risk, at any suffering, to escape the humiliation of meeting the eyes of that man. She knew now that it had actually been he whose side face she had seen as he spoke to Mrs. Garner. All the vague restlessness, the foolish terrors, the intense self-consciousness she had not been able to combat, but which had gathered into an overmastering pulsation of dread, were now explained. She wondered now that she had not altogether betrayed herself; that she had been able to keep herself from

screaming; for nothing less could have given vent to her rage, her despair, her self-disgust, that she, she alone, — in all that great shining tier, among those clear-faced, innocent-eyed, soft-voiced women, whose brows seemed never to have gathered into a frown over a moment's perplexity, — missed the pleasure of life; that in spite of all her brilliance and success, she alone was ill at ease.

She forced herself to renew all this crowd of impressions, to disentangle from them what was mere fright and nervousness, and look at the actual situation. This appeal to cool reason gradually restored her courage, and she experienced presently a revulsion of feeling as strong in its way as her first hysterical dread.

"I wonder," she said aloud then, "if he saw me." She pondered this question a moment, then answered herself with decision, "No, he could not have seen me." Next she asked herself, "Would he have known me?"

Half a dozen gas jets were turned up half way; she set them all blazing at their brightest, and moving forward stood looking at herself in the great mirror over the fireplace, all the light concentrated upon her face and figure.

"My hair was yellow in those days," she said thoughtfully. "It did not begin to turn dark until I was married to Algernon." She regarded her image, coquetry and love of domination awakening. "I wonder," she said with a little triumphant laugh, "what he would think of me now." The rich cloak, still trailing from her shoulders, dropped to the floor, and her figure stood revealed in its evening gown of white uncut velvet trimmed with marabou. "I weighed one hundred and eight in those days," she reflected, "now I weigh a hundred and thirty-eight."

She turned from side to side to show to her own admiring eye the supple curves of her waist, the round whiteness of her neek and arms, the rosy oval of her cheek. Yet even while she gazed critically at the image thus presented, saying to herself complacently that she was to all appearance as youthful as ever, beyond a doubt handsomer than ever in her life, to say nothing of being dressed to perfection, some recollection or painful thought smote her afresh and she stamped her foot, her brow growing black and her eyes hard.

"I look like one of the Furies," she said, coolly studying her change of features in the glass. "My mother's face comes out when I get in a rage. When I am old and ugly I shall look like her." She smiled again.

But the stamp of her foot, even though the thud had been muffled by the thick carpet, had roused some one. There came a tap at the door.

"Who is it?" cried Bella as if sharply startled. "Oh, is it you, Eugenia? I took it for granted you were in bed."

"I lay down on my lounge. I was very tired.

I heard you come in with Mr. Hartley, but I must have fallen asleep, for I did not know that he had gone. It was so late, and hearing only your voice occasionally and then a sound as of something falling, I thought it best to knock and inquire."

And Eugenia, holding her hand before her eyes to keep off the dazzle of the lights, advanced a few steps, fearfully and wonderfully elad in a gray dressing-gown, and stared at Mrs. Hernandez with curiosity.

"I was in a rage," said Bella flippantly, "and I talked to myself and stamped about the room. Had I felt sure you were awake, I should have gone in to you."

- "In a rage?" repeated Eugenia blankly. "With whom?"
- "Not with you. In fact it was not exactly being in a rage. Two sensations rushed together at once and made a clap of thunder, I suppose. Something startled me to-night. In all my life I was never so frightened as I was for a few minutes. A singular event has befallen me."
  - "Are you engaged to Mr. Hartley?"
  - "Engaged to Mr. Hartley? No."
  - "Have you refused him?"
- "Oh dear, no. How romantic you are! He seemed also in rather a romantic frame of mind, but I was not responsive, and he drew back. I was not in a mood to pretend. I was completely taken possession of by very different ideas. The future

did not exist for me, — I did not even think of the present. It was the past, the past, what novels call the inexorable past, that swallowed up all my thoughts."

Something in her look and tone, excited and rather reckless, startled Miss Shepard. She picked up the cloak which Bella was treading under foot, and, shaking out the fur, laid it across the arm of the sofa.

"I wish you would tell me what has happened," she said in a low, anxious voice.

"I have seen a ghost, - a ghost out of my old life. Actually, I did not suppose I was such a creature of nerves, presentiments, terrors. For years this thing has seemed to me like something happening to another person. If some suggestion of it did by chance present itself vividly, I would exclaim, 'Thank heaven, I am through that part of my life; it is dead and buried.' But the moment I saw him, I found I had forgotten nothing. I tingled as if I heard old reproaches, accusations, bitter sarcasms. People talk about our completely changing every tissue of our bodies in seven years; but see that dent in my forehead, - that came from a fall from a half-tamed mustang when I was ten years old. It is a part of me. Wounds heal over, but we have to keep the sears as long as we live. What we have lived through is a part of ourselves. It is of no use trying to run away from an experience, even to forget it. It is one's self. We cannot govern fate."

Eugenia saw that Mrs. Hernandez was overexcited, nervously wrought up.

"I hate aphorisms, enigmas, riddles, at twelve o'clock at night, when I long to be in my bed," she exclaimed. "I cannot keep up with your figures of speech. Drop your Spanish proverbs and metaphors, and if you have anything to say, put it into clear English."

"Come into my room," said Bella. "I can be taking off my things while I talk. Turn off the gas."

Leaving Eugenia to extinguish the lights, Bella went on to her own room, and at once made an equal illumination there, before the three-fold mirror, which permitted her to study her own loyely image from each point of view. To Eugenia, following in her steps, and pausing at the door to observe this proceeding, it seemed as if Mrs. Hernandez were pitting her beauty against that of some possible rival whom she longed to eclipse.

"You appear to be very much in love with your-

self," Miss Shepard said sharply.

"I am," Bella returned, laughing. "I was thinking that when I was nineteen I was a thin, sallow creature. All my beauty was in the future."

"It is midnight and past," said Miss Shepard.
"I am indifferent to all the beauty of the three goddesses rolled into one."

"Poor Eugenia," said Bella. She unclasped her necklace and bracelets, drew out the diamond

aigrette from her hair, and tossed them on the toilet-table. "Give me my dressing-gown," she said; "I am stifled in this uncomfortable thing." She unfastened the bodice, took off the dress and flung it on the bed, nestling into the loose quilted wrapper of dull red silk which Eugenia held up, not buttoning it, but folding one lace-trimmed front across the other, and clasping the two together at the belt with her hands, as she sat down in a low easy-chair before the fire of coals in the grate. "Come and make yourself comfortable," she said, in a tone of commiseration, as she glanced first at her own reflection in the mirror, and then at that of Eugenia, who was putting away the diamonds in their cases, smoothing out the gloves, the lace handkerchief, and hanging up the rich gown. It put Bella into a better humor, simply to see her own glowing beauty against the foil of her companion's plainness.

"This is cosy," she said, as Eugenia finally sat "Now we can talk." She held out her own little kid bottine to the fire, touching with its pointed toe Eugenia's huge, shapeless, worsted bedside slipper.

"You shall talk," said Eugenia briefly. "And please talk to the purpose. I have nothing on earth to say."

"I am ready to talk to the purpose. You have heard me tell of the time when my father kept a boarding-house by the Whitehouse lode?"

Eugenia nodded with inward discomfiture that this hideous reminiscence, instead of dwindling in remote perspective, was to loom up closer. "When I used to wait on the table! Imagine me, Bella Brown, nineteen years old, with a new pink calico dress one July day, for the first time waiting on a young man who, instead of swearing at me, or treating me with vulgar freedom, looked at me with amazement, seemed wretched at giving me trouble, and finally turned a drunken fellow out of the room for taking a liberty."

"This young man was —"

"This young man had just arrived from the East, — he was a mining-chemist, an assayist, a mineralogist." Bella paused.

"Well," said Eugenia.

"He fell in love with me,—he fell in love on the instant; a week later we were engaged to be married, and from that moment he would not permit me to wait on the table. He told my father it was profanation; he said I ought not to be permitted to hold the most distant intercourse with the men who boarded at our house. It was not his way to be slow about anything he undertook. Just after the first of August we were married, and I went to live in my own house, a mile away from the Whitehouse."

"What was this young man's name?" inquired Miss Shepard, with an air of singular precision.

"Lawrence Garthe."

- "Never in all my life before have I heard you make an allusion to Lawrence Garthe."
- "Probably not," said Bella coolly. "There are some things a woman is not inclined to talk about. But now I will confide to you the fact that Lawrence Garthe was my first husband."
- "I supposed Colonel Higby was your first husband."
- "No; Lawrence Garthe. It is only the first step that counts, they say, and judging by my sensations to-night, one's first marriage is more impressive than any later one can be."
- "Why did you never tell me this before?" said Eugenia almost wildly. "Before I consented to join you, I told you I wanted to hear the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."
- "The whole truth is a large, deep, and difficult thing to tackle sometimes," said Bella, who now fairly embarked in her narrative seemed to be in absolute high spirits. "I told you that I had been married to Colonel Higby, then, as he had in every way disappointed my expectations, not only having no money, but in having every bad habit, I procured a divorce from him. You said you could not blame me. You know that I then married Aurelio Hernandez. That seemed sufficient for the moment."
- "Did this Lawrence Garthe die?" demanded Miss Shepard.
- "On the contrary, he is alive and here in New York."

- "Did you part?"
- "No doubt we parted."
- "Were you divorced?"
- "We were divorced. That is, I obtained a divorce on the ground of desertion. You may have observed that on the first day of every month I receive a check for one hundred and fifty dollars. He has to pay me that amount as long as I live."
  - "Did he really desert you?"
  - "He really deserted me."
- "Somehow," said Eugenia restlessly, "I do not quite believe you, although you usually tell some fragment of the truth."

Bella flung back her head and laughed.

"I admit," she said frankly, "there were some ins and outs to the story. It burns in my memory to-night, -I must tell it; I was almost inclined to pour it out to Ferdinand Hartley. I can think of nothing else, I can see nothing else, - it is like a fire on a dark night. You can't begin to think how, at the sight of him, everything belonging to that time surged over me; it was like a flood. And after all, though so much has happened since, it was less than nine years ago! He was little more than a boy then, - he is young still. I was a saucy young girl, on the lookout for a lover who was to be the handsomest and richest fellow on that side of the slope. He had a fair salary, but there were plenty of men fifty times richer; but what I saw in him I had seen in nobody else. He was so calm, so strong, so wise. All the men looked up to him as if he had been a being of a different order."

"And he fell in love with you!"

"Strange as it may appear to you, Eugenia, this being of a superior order fell in love with me. In a month we were married. He built a little house, quite a palace for those parts, with five rooms in it, and we went to housekeeping, with a Chinaman for help."

"Were you happy? Were you in love with him?"

"I was flattered out of my senses. I supposed that I was madly in love. Happy? I expected to die of happiness."

"Evidently, I see you were n't happy."

"Have I not told you over and over that I am a true modern woman, —that I can't be happy or contented except at odd moments? I felt very proud of my capture. I had a handsome, adoring young husband. He believed in me, thought I could do anything, be anything. He wanted to develop me. He set about teaching me. His idea of enjoyment was to come home at night, read aloud to me, or have me read aloud to him until ten o'clock; then when I had gone to bed, get out his books and work until midnight or later. Sometimes he was too busy at the mines to come home at all. Oh, that first winter! Our Chinaman fell ill and had to go away. The snows piled up. It was so cold that bread, meat, eggs, were solid ice, — had

to be broken with an axe. There were days when Lawrence and I were shut up together as if in a little world of our own, inside the real world. He studied, he experimented, he read to me, he talked. He was brimful of wonder, of speculation, of theory, of ideas that moved him out of himself, over things that were to me nothing but odd-looking stones, or queer-smelling vapors. It was not my idea of what was an interesting life, I can assure you. I grew so tired of it all, - I used finally to put my hands to my ears. He used to gaze at me at such times, as if he were heartbroken. Then he tried other diversions. But a spell was upon me; I was restless, discontented, rebellious. did I want? he would ask, kneeling before me some times. Was not love, companionship, hope, enough for me? Had I not my baby-clothes to make, and when I tired of sewing, had I not his society, books, portfolios of photographs, a cabinet of curious minerals? I was as incomprehensible to him as he was incomprehensible to me. He used to say he should like a whole week's leisure, just to sit and look at the mountain peaks where they met the sky; and I remember once assuring him that I hated the mountains, hated the sky, - that everything I saw above, around, below, seemed to me prison-walls, which I longed to break through. He did not, he could not understand that I found it dull, just dull, - that I missed the old life at home with its hard work, its noise, bustle, and variety. At home there was always news; something had happened, — somebody had struck a new vein; somebody had picked up a rich nugget; there had been a fight, a railway accident, — something to think about and talk about. Then all the men who came and went at our house had a word for me, a joke, a compliment, a present. I liked them, rough as they were, but had turned my back on them for the sake of a slim, elegant young fellow who was furious if one of my old cronies ventured to approach me. What I lived on, he loathed. . . . Then the baby came!"

"You had a child!"

"Oh, yes, a little boy named after his father. What a frightful ordeal! Then what a bondage! You talk about the wrongs of women, Eugenia, but you don't know how cruelly we are treated, not alone by man but by Nature. Before the child was born, I had exuberant health and no occupations to expend it on. I had complained at first of having nothing to do after I was married. I assure you, I had plenty to occupy me after the child came. My own health was spoiled then. I had no experience, and more than once the little creature almost died of cramp or croup or colic. could n't get hold of a respectable woman to help me nurse him, and Lawrence was, oh, so deadly particular, that a woman who was not respectable must not be allowed to contaminate me. That husband of mine seemed as soft as silk, but where the

baby was concerned he held me to my duties with a clutch like iron. It seemed to me he no longer cared for me; he seemed to have no thought of what I liked, of what I wished. I was simply in his eyes the mother, the nurse of his boy! My strength came back, and then things grew even more insupportable. There I was, only twenty years old, with the blood bubbling in my veins like champagne, longing day after day for something to break the silence, the tedium. I used to beg him to live in a town or a city, some place where I might find human companionship, something interesting to do. 'What would you do if you could?' he asked one day when I was pouring out complaints. I replied that I had an individual life to lead, that I was no mere appendage to him and the child; that I wanted and needed and demanded a career of my own, just as he wanted a career for himself. Why should I not tell him it was his first duty in life to stay at home and mind the baby?

"He looked at me, — I can see him now with his brow all in a pucker. Then he said in a low voice, 'Ever since I was ten years old I have been at work. It has been dig, dig, dig, with me; first to find out where it was best to take hold, then how to take hold, and then to set myself doggedly at the task. I wanted to make my own living; but more than that, I wanted the happiness, the stimulus, the emancipation of a real knowledge of

my profession. I have gone on so far, but I have no intention of remaining fixed forever in one groove.' I told him I was glad to hear that, for I had feared he loved the rut he was in for its own sake. I asked him to go to Francisco, or some place on the coast.

"He stared at me and said he needed his salary to buy clothes for me and the boy, to feed us, to give us a home. He said he needed to study hard, or other men better equipped than himself would push him out of his place. I told him that if we went to some city I could earn money to support myself, - that I should be glad to do so; that I liked work, that in old days at home with hard work to do and plenty to see and think about, I had never been discontented or unhappy. You should have seen the scorn he flashed out at me, - that I was pining for the society of the uncouth, unwashed crowd he had saved me from, - half of them thieves and gamblers, some of them murderers, ready to settle any brawl with a stab or pistol shot. . . . He could pour out angry reproaches, bitter sareasms, but then he was sure to melt. He used to make me feel, at times, that unless I could become as good, as sweet and noble as he wanted me to be, he should die of grief, of shame, of humiliation. What he would not, what he could not understand was that I was myself, that by my own heart, lungs, brain, muscles, and nerves I had to feel, think, act; that by no

virtue of his heart, brain, muscles, nerves, could I live for a day, and that I could no more absorb his spiritual than his material essence."

She paused and looked at Eugenia, who sat huddling for warmth over the fire, her eyes almost closed, her face drawn and lifeless.

"Of course you agree with me, Eugenia," she said. "I am echoing words you have spoken again and again."

"Words I have spoken?" Eugenia repeated as

if aghast.

- "I have heard you say in private and in public that a woman has just the same right to seek free play for her powers and faculties as a man; that no more essential reason exists for her being a slave to domesticity than for his being a slave."
- "I go with you part way," said Eugenia in a harsh voice, "but I should be a fool if I did not accept the fact that so long as the world is to last women must bear children, and that"—
- "I have heard you say that a woman has a right to make her choice, to"—
- "But you made your choice," cried Eugenia sharply. "You married a good man who loved you, you promised yourself to him for better or for worse."
- "There was no choice in the matter. I was a mere child. I was surprised, flattered, carried away by novelty,—my father considered it a great chance for me to marry Lawrence Garthe.

Before I had time to analyze my own real wishes and inclinations I was shut up in a cabin with a man whose ideas of everything in existence were the exact opposite of my own, who believed that in making me his wife he put his own private seal on each one of my thoughts, feelings, cravings, and No, I did not exercise my right of free passions. choice at all, or I should never have chosen him. He soon found out that he could not make me his willing slave, - a docile little creature with no mind, heart, or will of her own, content to sit admiringly echoing each of his opinions." She gave a little low laugh. "The odd thing was," she added, "that with his growing knowledge of what I had in me, he should have let me go out of his sight."

"What happened?" demanded Miss Shepard almost fiercely.

"He was already jealous of everything and of everybody; he might have known that —"

"What happened?" said Miss Shepard with an impatient gesture. Bella drew a long, deep breath.

"He had to go to Alaska. I begged to go along, but he would not take me. He said that he must have three or four men with him, and that it was no party for a woman to join." She stopped short, put her hand to her breast, and again, as if stifled, drew in that long, deep breath. "But I felt all the time," she went on in a soft,

clear tone, "that the actual reason was that, as the boy was too young to be left, he considered it my duty to stay and take care of him."

"How old was the child?"

"Fifteen months. I could have left him perfectly well with Mrs. Fraser, who came to stay with me." She gave a shuddering little laugh. "In fact I did leave him with her."

"Who was Mrs. Fraser?"

"The wife of the superintendent." Bella was leaning forward and looking into the fire.

"Tell me what happened," said Eugenia.

"It was horrible, being left," said Bella dreamily. "We were on the mountain slope. I could not sleep at night, it was so eerie. There were strange noises, — something used to come and howl outside."

She paused and looked up at Eugenia with an expression half appealing.

"What happened?" demanded Eugenia inflexibly.

Again Bella drew in that long shuddering breath.

"He was to have been gone from six to eight weeks. He came back at the end of four, and, as it turned out, I was not there."

"Where were you?"

"You need not be so fierce. I simply took a little outing. I needed a little amusement. There was no great harm done. It was his coming back unexpectedly, finding Mrs. Fraser taking care of the boy, pressing inquiries upon her, then following up the clue she gave, which did the mischief. was not alone Mrs. Fraser, - everybody had been watching, it seems, and had some dreadful story to pour into his ears. Meantime I heard that he had returned. I knew that it would all seem horrible to him, - that each little indiscretion, rebellion, and naughtiness of mine would now be to him a sure index pointing to sin. I have said that he was jealous, and the instant a man is jealous, jealousy teaches him base suspicion, outrageous conjecture. What do you suppose Lawrence did?"

Eugenia, with her chin dropped, her eyes raised and fixed like those of one suffering mortal pain, was cowering in her chair. She did not speak.

"He resigned his position at the mines, took the boy, and vanished," said Bella, looking down at the tips of her pointed toes. "So after a time I applied for a divorce on the ground of desertion."

Perhaps dismayed by her companion's silence she looked at her.

- "Are you asleep, Eugenia?" she asked.
- "No," said Eugenia in a dull suffering voice.
- "How does it all strike you?"

Eugenia seemed, as if by hard effort, to pull herself together.

"Why did you never tell me this story before?" she faltered.

- "It all happened long ago," said Bella calmly.
  "I got my ease, and, on promising to give up all claim to my child, I was granted one hundred and fifty dollars a month alimony. So you see I was left entirely free."
  - "Free! Good God! You call that freedom?"
- "Had he not left me neither maid, wife, nor widow? He owed me something."
- "What was his plea! What was his justification?"
- "He was already in Europe. He left his case to the lawyers. He made no accusation, he put up no defense. All he asked for was to have full possession of the child. We might have made him pay more if we had insisted, but we did not realize our own strength."

Eugenia gazed at her with a strange anxiety.

"I'm afraid," she whispered, "there was something behind all this."

Bella shrugged her shoulders.

- "You may as well be a rational woman, a woman of the world. When there is a scandal about a woman there is apt to be a man behind it."
  - "Oh, great heavens!"
- "I was married to him, I was married to him the very day I could legally marry him, if that is your apprehension," said Bella. "It was all a horrible mistake, — the great mistake of my life. I was wretchedly taken in."

"Was it Colonel Higby?" inquired Eugenia, as if with a faint hope that she was regaining depths already plumbed.

"No, his name was Algernon Danvers-Carr. He was an Englishman, — his grandfather was a baronet. He had drifted away from civilized life and made himself a career in the West. When I knew him he was a horse-breaker."

"A horse-breaker!"

"You may be horrified, but it is a very good profession out among those great ranches, and I assure you it is rather a fascinating experience to see a handsome fellow break in blooded colts and wild mustangs. I myself had a taste for riding and I used to help him, — that was at first, before I myself had been broken in to harness. Oh, let us talk of something pleasanter."

"Did you have a divorce from him too?"

"No, he was shot in a fight at Evan's; by accident, they pretended."

Eugenia had hidden her face in her hands.

"Now you have my whole history," said Bella, "and it is easy to see that you despise me." She had seen a little trembling shiver pass over the recumbent figure. "I realize too late," she continued, "that I have been too candid. I ought, if not to have suppressed it, at least to have glossed it over. But I did believe, Eugenia, that you upheld your sex, stood by them through thick and thin, when they were left to fight their own battle.

You theorize very well, but your practice is not worth a button. You draw back frightened when a woman acts on the propaganda you proclaim. Now I, at least, have the courage of my opinions."

"If you had told me your true history when we first met!" said Eugenia with a sort of desperation.

"I did tell you I had had two husbands. After all, I have had only four."

"So far, — you are thinking of another," said Eugenia, guiltless of sarcasm, merely stating a fact.

"Yes, I am thinking of another." Bella laughed slightly as she spoke, but at the same time gave a little shudder and bent over the fire. "You need not suppose," she added hastily, "that I am utterly callous. I have more history than I like to admit. I don't so much mind the actual fact, as the being laughed at,—for it is absurd. Sometimes when I am in high spirits I laugh at myself. I heard a story once of a man who had four wives, and buried one at each corner of his lot in the cemetery, while he erected his own tomb in the centre, with a hand pointing from each of his wives' graves towards the words 'Our husband.'"

She burst into shrill laughter.

"What will the woman not laugh at?" muttered Eugenia.

"Two are dead and two are alive," said Bella in an odd voice, "and one of them is living here

in New York, — with my little boy, the only child I have in the world."

"Your little boy!" ejaculated Eugenia. "I had n't thought of that."

"Yes, my little boy. I had a little girl by my second husband, — she died when she was six months old. She was a beautiful little creature," Bella said in a dreamy voice. "I want to see what my boy is like."

"You gave him up, - you gave him up for money."

"That does not alter the fact of his being my own child," said Bella calmly. "I do not pretend to possess overwhelming maternal instincts; still one's child is one's child, and a mother must feel a certain amount of curiosity." She gazed meditatively into the fire. "I saw Lawrence quite plainly," she added after a few moments' silence. "He is scarcely any older, and if anything he is handsomer than he was. He did not look unhappy. Unhappy, I should think not! Ferdinand Hartley says that he is well off, if not rich, that he is in love with that Mrs. Garner we have seen, - you remember her, Eugenia, - a rather pretty, faded-out creature, - graceful manners, but -" She broke off. "After all," she said in a different tone, "it is I who have had to pay, not he."

"Who breaks pays," said Eugenia.

"I can afford to pay," said Bella insolently. "And after all I have not done so badly. To

compare myself with what I was when I set out ought to encourage me to go on living." She laughed. "Here I am living in luxury. I can marry a young man of good family and position, handsome, highly educated, who is used to having everything that is best in life. I am vouched for by one of the prominent women of the day"—

"A blind leader of the blind," muttered Eu-

genia.

"A woman," continued Bella, mimicking the tone and words of a presiding officer who had the day before introduced Miss Shepard at a convention of notables, "who is preaching the new crusade, who is declaring the new evangel."

"It is not true," cried Eugenia excitedly, her voice rising to a half-suppressed shriek. "I do not preach the crusade of women who break every tie, disregard every obligation, who are true to nothing."

"Oh yes," said Bella mockingly, "I have been true to myself."

"To your wild, reckless impulse, to "-

"Don't preach. As a mere matter of taste I might have preferred a pleasanter road without dust, stones, mire, but I had to do what I' could. I was not born in the purple, — my opportunities did not come to me ready-made. Whatever I have been through, at last I have arrived, and I am glad that I am what I am, — that I shall always be I, Bella Brown, and nobody else."

Miss Shepard moaned drearily.

"You are quite worn out, Eugenia. You had better go to bed," said Bella with commiseration. "These late hours tell on your spirits and temper, and your good looks suffer. I assure you they do. Go to bed. Shall I give you a glass of port wine?"

"No, thank you." Eugenia rose stiffly and stood for a moment looking down at the other with a grim face.

"Kiss me good-night," said Bella imperiously.
"I'm no worse than I was twenty-four hours ago, and then you seemed downright fond of me."

Eugenia stooped and pressed an arid kiss on the rosy cheek, then stalked out of the room without another word.

The fire was low, but Bella sat bending over it for half an hour yet. She had lived through so many conditions of mind and body, so separate and so distinct, that each seemed to represent a different identity; but at this moment the tingle and the thrill of old feelings, sensations, and experiences, were all related to Lawrence Garthe. Floating, scattered threads of memory and association were re-gathered and re-woven into one single picture. She felt as if there must be some way of paying him a part of the debt she owed him. The quick thumping of her heart had returned. Her blood moved in a livelier current than her intellect; but at intervals some intimation of pos-

sible action darted across her mind like lightning playing on the edge of a dull, unmoving cloud.

After a time, tired of ineffectual wrestling with what constantly vanished into impalpability the moment she touched it, she yawned, stretched out her arms, and rose. Half a dozen jets of gas were still blazing, and threw a dazzling reflection of her image into the glass as she turned. She stood still, regarding herself, her thoughts gaining coherence, and some clear intention gathering force. The expression of her eyes and lips suggested that she was mentally rehearsing a drama in which some man had to play his part against her, and by her smile, touched with irony and disdain, she seemed to win. Apparently she developed her scheme quite to her own liking, for once or twice, while she was undressing, she uttered a little peal of mischievous laughter, and even after she was in bed, her cheek against the pillow and her lithe figure nestled in an attitude of complete repose under sheets and blankets, there came again that peal of laughter, evidently the effervescence of some aspiration, hope, or resolution welling up joyfully within her.

### CHAPTER XII.

#### GARTHE AND LARRY.

THE first face Garthe saw in the morning when he opened his eyes was certain to be his little son's. Larry would come rushing down the stairs as soon as he was awake, to make sure that his father was in his bed. He sprang into the extended arms with a cry of joy; he pressed kisses upon the lips, the cheeks, the eyelids, the temples, of the calm, faintly smiling face. The boy had a hundred little confidences to pour into the willing ears. At the mere sight of his father a dozen sensations rushed together at once, and sometimes made such a knot in his throat that he had, in spite of being so happy, to burst out crying. He loved his father so much; he was so proud of him; he longed so to be beloved by him, to be a joy, to be clever, to be good, in order to please him; above all, to get close, very close, and to hug him! The same outburst of feeling took place when Garthe came home before dinner. The man seemed sometimes rather to undergo these caresses than to answer them, but if passive he was not cold. Something in his vivid look, in his half smile, in the strong clasp of his arms, would thrill the little fellow with a delicious eestasy of feeling.

"You love me, you do love me dearly, don't you, papa?" Larry would say with intense satisfaction as he curled into his father's embrace and nestled close within the encircling pressure.

Then Garthe would give a little nod, or would say, "Oh yes, my little son, papa loves you."

It was this joy in loving, this necessity of being beloved, which gave Garthe a fuller insight into what new faculties, what deeper happiness, Constance might bring into Larry's life. Nothing Garthe could have urged in his own behalf could have smitten him with the same tenderness as this realization of Larry's need of a mother. The chief constituent of Garthe's own mind had so long been a stoical acceptance of his lot, he could hardly believe in his own right to expect happiness. Not sorrow but joy seemed incongruous where he himself was concerned. Within reach of Constance, he was nothing if not a passionate lover; but often enough, when alone over his own fire at midnight, this impulse towards the sweetest woman he had ever seen was apt to seem a waste of aspiration, incomplete and always to be incomplete; his ardor rather something to be conquered than permitted; his hope rather to be crucified than crowned. was when he thought simply of his wish to have her as his wife; as Larry's mother, his hope to bring her to his lonely house became resolution, and his faith in a happy future an active force. He liked, accordingly, to image to himself Larry's little curly

head against Constance's shoulder; her arm about him, her pure proud face rising above his. He carried this mental picture about with him so constantly that presently it became an inexhaustible resource to think of Constance forever close to Larry. As the boy ran down the stairs, was she not somewhere behind him, like the child all thrilling and expectant with a soft glance of welcome in her eyes? At table Garthe could imagine her across the board, and in twilight or firelight, when Larry perched on his knee and chattered of his playmates, of his teacher, the pictures he had drawn, the horse he had modeled, she was near, quiet to all seeming, yet instinct with life; only a reaching out of the hand, a touch, was necessary. Often enough, as Garthe took his little son in his arms now-a-days, he felt the weight of the little body with a thrill which awoke a strange gush of tenderness.

One Sunday afternoon in February, Garthe told Larry he would give him a lesson in skating; and, setting out, they walked across the park to a quiet little pond. It was a day of crystalline clearness. It had first rained, then frozen, the night before, and the trees and shrubs were covered with a shining white crust. Every thicket was transformed into a fairy grotto; icicles glittered on the statues. From every object was reflected prismatic light. The whole park was alive. An incessant stream of sleighs of every shape, with gayly decked horses, glided rapidly along the drives, which were lined

with a crowd of lookers-on enjoying the glitter, the stir, the melody of the bells. Larry was in high glee. They found a quiet nook; his father fastened on his skates, then, supporting him, bore him about on wings, as it were, until he gained courage. Timid at first, the little fellow gradually became assured. Still grasping his father's arm, he could venture to strike out, almost independently. Finally Garthe himself put on a pair of skates, took the boy by the hand, and off they skated together! How fast they went, thought Larry, how smooth, how pleasant, how swift the motion! It was like flying! He believed he could fly by himself, and he begged his father to trust him to his own wings. Oh, what an awkward tumble!

"I am safest with you, papa," cried Larry. "Don't let me go alone any more."

Garthe was almost as happy as the boy himself. It was one of those days when a stimulating, vitalizing quality in the air gives a man possession of his whole strength; when exercise brings a sense of refreshment, of mental and physical equipoise. The thought of Constance did not leave him. Everything seemed easy. Any reason for hesitation, for delay, would soon be over. Kathy would incline towards Mr. Marchmont; if not, she could live with Constance and himself. Practical questions took their places along with others. He would buy the Garner house on Lexington Avenue, and present it to Constance on their wedding day.

He could afford the outlay, and it would be a pleasure to save his wife any wrench away from her lifelong associations. This feeling of conferring a benefit, of making her way clearer, seemed to justify his course, if it needed justification. To-day he did not deny himself the joy of counting assuredly upon a happy future.

The sun was low. The rays struck horizontally across the landscape, setting a warm halo round the blonde heads of the boys and girls on the ice.

"Come, Larry, we must go home," he said.

The boy looked up, his eyes full of light, his mind running over with impressions of his joy in his new skates, the crisp air, the sounds of life, the moving masses of color, the joy of being with his father.

"Oh, don't go home yet, papa," he cried.
"There's nothing at home."

"Oh yes, there's supper, and a fire, and a bed," said Garthe. He took off the little fellow's skates, although he constantly implored:—

"Oh, dearest, best papa, not yet."

"There comes the moon," said Garthe. "It is full to-night, and rises just as the sun sets."

In the west, although the red disk had sunk below the horizon, broken fiery rays lighted up the sky. In the east, behind the frozen pond which gleamed steely blue, and the trees on the knoll which stood out clearly, some of their branches still imprisoning in their icicles the hues of the sunset, floated up the golden moon. They walked towards it.

"When I was a little fellow of your age," said Garthe, "I had a brother just two years older. It was he who taught me how to skate. We used also to coast together down a long, long hill. While I had him with me to climb to the top again I did not mind how high that hill was. But Benny fell ill; so ill that I had to sit quietly about the house and make no noise, - simply wait, wait, wait for somebody to come out of the room and tell me how he was. They would not let me go in, although more than once I heard him calling me. When finally I was admitted, he lay still, very still. He was dressed in white, and his hands, which had used to be red, chubby, rough, and not over clean, were white and slender. After that, when I had to climb up the long hill with my sled all alone, I used to feel my eyes smart and a lump in my throat. The wind was so cold, and I was so lonely!"

- "But what became of Benny, papa?"
- "You see, dear, he had died."
- "Oh, papa!" cried Larry, his little face puckering.
- "Yes, it was very sad, very miserable. Before then there had been mamma, Benny, and me. After that I had only mamma."
  - "You had no papa?"
  - "No, he died when I was three years old."
  - "I'm glad you didn't die, papa," said Larry,

trying to assert his own good fortune against all these reasons for despair.

"By-and-by, after tea," said Garthe, "I will tell you how dear my mamma was to me,—how precious it was to have a mamma. You may tell Amelia that she and Button can both go to church. I will put you to bed myself."

Delightful promise! To be left to his father's sole care was invariably to have some wonderfully satisfying experience. They had dined early, and for tea had a cold roast chicken, and marmalade. Larry had been out in the cool crisp air; he had used his muscles unwontedly; he had been very hungry; he had eaten his fill; he had drunk two whole cups of hot milk. He sat perfectly happy, looking with love and longing at his father, who began, oddly enough, to seem very, very far off.

"Asleep, are you, already?" somebody said to him; and, strange to relate, it was his father, who, instead of dwindling at the end of a long lighted perspective, was here, close beside him.

"Oh no, papa," Larry replied; "not asleep at all."

"I had better put you to bed at once."

"Oh no, I'm wide awake," said Larry; then presently, on opening his eyes, discovered that he was in his father's arms and that they were both before the fire in the library.

"Now I say, sleepy boy," Garthe was saying, "how should you like it if you had a mother of

your own sitting just there? A beautiful, young mamma, who would love you,—love you dearly,—call you her own little boy?"

It was this question which roused Larry, unglued his eyelids, and released him from the spell of dim, fantastic fancies.

"Just there in that chair?" he asked, turning and staring hard at the spot.

- "Yes, just there, in that pretty chair. Do you want to know what she would be like? She would have beautiful dark eyes which speak without her saying a word, and the sweetest smile you ever saw. She would have on a pretty gown, a gown you would never tire of looking at and admiring. There would be rings on the fingers of her soft white hands. She would hold out her arms to you; you would run and jump into her lap. She would put her cheek against yours, and let you nestle against her shoulder and go to sleep if you chose."
- "Oh, papa," said Larry, blushing and dimpling, "I should be wide awake. I should n't want to go to sleep."
- "You would like it, then, having a dear mamma there?"
- "Oh, very much," said Larry. "Would she really be my mother? I thought I had n't got any mother."
- "God is good," said Garthe devoutly. "He gives us what we need. I have been a solitary man, you have been a lonely little boy. He is

going to make it up to us. You will be a good son to this dear lady, Larry? You will be obedient, loving, anxious to please her?"

"Oh, papa, I will give her everything I have got in the world." He closed his eyes the better to enumerate his riches to himself with which he was to endow her. She should have Fido, Mou-mou, his music-box, his animated toys. . . . He hears a low laugh, and experiences a gentle pinch on his cheek. He is quite sure he is not asleep. He can hear the dear familiar voice, he can feel the warm, gentle hand on his hair. He perceives, as in a golden mist, a whole new world of things, and feels ecstatically happy. The voice murmurs and murmurs on. Somebody is laughing again. There is an odd sensation of being upborne. The air is cooler. Is he flying? Has he somehow found wings? Again he nestles close against something soft and warm, and feels the pressure of a loving cheek against his own. A hand takes his so tenderly that Larry seizes it in both his and carries it to his lips, which fasten to it drowsily like a bee to a flower. Suddenly he is wide awake. "Oh, is it you, papa?" he asks incredulously. "I thought perhaps it was mamma."

"Not yet," Garthe replies, laughing. "Such a sleepy boy! Keep awake until I get your things off."

"It was n't a dream, papa?" Larry murmurs, sitting up, rubbing his eyes, and looking round his bedroom. "She will come."

"Yes, please God, she will come."

He huddles into his nightgown. His father gathers him into his arms and clasps him passionately.

"Oh, I love you, papa," the little fellow says.

"Kneel down and say, 'Please, dear God, bless papa, bless mamma, make me a good boy."

"Please, dear God, bless papa, bless mamma, make me a good boy."

"For Jesus Christ's sake, amen."

"For Jesus Christ's sake, amen."

He loves his father and this blessed encircling vision of a beautiful mother so dearly that his eyes run over. Still he is fast asleep on his knees. . . . He is tumbling into his bed, again very wide awake. It occurs to him suddenly that he must have his Swiss cow,—that one that moves her head and tinkles the little silver bell at her throat, —to go to sleep with. It is, indeed, quite essential, for that cow never likes to be left alone all night. Garthe hunts high, hunts low,—finds the creature, and tucks it into a corner of the pillow.

"And mamma is really coming?" Larry tries to say, but the effort is beyond his power. He feels kisses on his brow, on his temples, on his lips, and sinks to sleep encompassed and infolded in a consciousness of some great, overwhelming joy.

# CHAPTER XIII.

#### SUNDAY EVENING.

"A woman may be old," said Mrs. Challoner, "a woman may think she has given up the battle, but her instincts are indestructible. She is still a cat when she sees a mouse."

John Marchmont had dropped in upon Mrs. Challoner on this same Sunday afternoon. It was usually his way on a Sunday, and to-day, contrary to custom, he found her alone. The tide had set in some other direction.

"Still a cat if you see a mouse," he observed

meditatively.

- "And sometimes," Mrs. Challoner proceeded daringly, pursuing her figure of speech, "I have longed to be a real Puss-in-Boots, and to eat up a Marquis of Carabas. Now there was Ferdinand Hartley."
  - "Surely, you did not put an end to him?"
  - "No, he apparently finished himself."
  - "Who is it you are longing to devour now?"
- "The fault of metaphors is that they mix themselves up," said Mrs. Challoner, who sat, easy, welldressed, smiling, in her favorite chair, with her favorite belongings around her. She had for

months been desirous of a chance to meddle in the destinies of certain people, feeling sure that she, better than others, could set things right, smooth out the tangled skein. "What I mean," she now proceeded, "is that I am apt to feel murderous when I have a favorite object in view."

- "What is your present favorite object?" he inquired.
  - "To begin with, I want to see you married."
- "I married! me married!" he repeated as if incredulous.
  - "Well, why not?"
- "I have lived fifty-six years without a wife. Few and troubled are the years which lie between me and my grave."
  - "Nonsense. There is a duty in these matters."
- "Of course I ought to have married thirty years ago."
- "I do not say that at all. I am not looking up past, but present and future duties. I'm rather glad, in point of fact, that you did not marry thirty years ago. Your wife would have been a contemporary of mine. Perhaps, I should not have liked her. Perhaps, as a married man and father of a family, I should not have liked you."
- "Exactly. It is not in my line. I have had a conscience in the matter, and have given every woman a chance to get a better husband than I could have made her."
  - "Do not say such things. I hate modesty; I

hate a spirit of self-sacrifice. It is paraded as a virtue, but all it does is to foster selfishness and conceit in other people. If a man is modest he had better keep it to himself. The world is apt to consider that he has, no doubt, good grounds for speaking ill of himself."

- "Anything to please you; I will turn egoist at once."
  - "First, I want you to marry."
  - "Whom shall I marry, pray?"
- "There is Constance Garner," suggested Mrs. Challoner, with the cunning of the serpent.
  - "Constance Garner? She is like my own child."
- "Well, Kathy, then," said Mrs. Challoner in a wheedling tone.
- "Would n't it be rather absurd for a gray-headed old fellow to faney that a young and blooming creature was meant for his consolation?"
- "Nonsense. I was telling Mr. Challoner this morning that of all the men I know you seemed best calculated to make a woman happy."

Mr. Marchmont ehuckled. "What did Challoner say to that?"

"He said he was sorry for me, but as he had, so far as he was aware, no mortal disease, some tragical event seemed to be necessary. However, I assured him that I was disinterested,—that what I wished was to insure not my own happiness but that of the woman you were in love with."

"What makes you think I am in love with anybody?" said Mr. Marchmont, blushing rosy red.

"Because you show it, whether you stand, walk, sit, eat, drink, talk, or are silent. You can't get outside yourself. I used to look forward to seeing you, — to refreshing myself from your overflow. Now you are the slave of one idea. When a man loves a woman with delicacy, with tenderness, with adoration, he loves stupidly."

"I admit the stupidity."

"Then, being in love stupidly, there is the necessity of being jealous."

"I admit also the necessity of being jealous."

"When there is nobody to be jealous of?"

"Nobody to be jealous of! You do not understand the situation."

"I used to fancy you were jealous of Ferdinand Hartley, but I told you he was not in love with her. The moment he saw that rich Western widow he no longer had a thought of Kathy. Who else is there? Of course there are Teddy Frost and Jack Challoner, but they are like half a dozen others, mere walking men."

"How about Lawrence Garthe?"

"He is in love with Constance."

"But if Constance gives him up to her stepmother, if Kathleen herself fancies him"—

"Mr. Garthe is in love with Constance, I say."

"And Constance is well worth being in love with; but Kathleen is so much more charming."

Mrs. Challoner's eyes danced.

"But I insist on having Mr. Garthe for Con-

stance, and I want you for Kathy. Why do you not speak out?"

He looked at her with eagerness.

- "Ought I to speak?" he asked.
- "Of course you ought to speak."
- "At the risk of robbing her of the chance to fall in love with somebody else?"
  - "Accept all risks, and act for yourself."
  - "I am so much older!"
  - "You are just so much wiser."
  - " I doubt that, and youth is for youth."
- "What is youth? You are a century younger than the cold, dull, cynical young fellows of to-day. Everybody who knows you feels stimulated and stirred up after a talk with you. Besides, you are an artist, and to have an art is to be always young."
- "You cannot make me the dupe of my own illusions. I am too old for her."
- "You could not be the man you are unless you had lived just so long and just so deeply, and had come to just this culmination of experience. There may be drawbacks, but in how many marriages do you find absolutely perfect conditions? At all events, let Kathy understand you, let her know that you care for her. Silence is the cruelest thing in the world, and the realm of unavoidable silence—silence which nothing can break is large enough without adding to it the silence which results from our own doubt, our own indecision, our own timidity. Life is so short! The end of all things comes

so soon, — soonest of all, the end of our dearest things."

Mrs. Challoner had possibly taken advantage of the fact that other visitors were entering, to speak with some solemnity. It was like a dismissal, like a benediction, and John Marchmont accepted it with a bent head and went out. He had great faith in Mrs. Challoner, not only in her friendship but in her knowledge of the world. She was not a woman to dogmatize upon any subject, but possessed by nature a just and accurate sense of people and events, gauging them with prompt decision, which enabled her to be a touchstone for a nature like John Marchmont's, invariably halting a little before pushing his own claims, feeling that no man can tell what having his own will and way may do to the injury of mankind.

He spent the remainder of the day at his sister's, meditating upon what he had heard. He honestly desired for Kathy the best that could happen to her, and possibly the best thing that could happen to her was to marry himself. Had he not a house and lands, a comfortable property, and did not his pictures sell? Was not Kathy poor, while at the same time did she not take delight in the ample, the magnificent, in the easy way in which money may make material means subordinate to ends! Not that he was rich enough to make it worth a woman's while to marry him for money, but he was inclined to dwell a little on some clear advan-

tage to be gained by Kathy in becoming Mrs. John Marchmont, for he abhorred the idea of her accepting him out of sympathy. He had habitually shown her his coldest side. He could, he believed, consistently thank Heaven that he had softened no roughness in himself, enhanced no values, invested himself with no glamour. She knew him at his worst. If he were now to change his rôle from that of a disinterested friend he must convince her by demonstration that as a lover he was quite another thing, could give points to Benedict, out-Romeo Romeo; that, Methuselah as he was, he yet resembled one of those marvelous casks which jugglers handle, out of which every variety of generous wine can be drawn at will.

He was in a genial after-dinner mood, when at half-past eight he went down the steps of his sister's house, and encountered Lawrence Garthe coming up.

"I wanted to see you," said the latter. "I felt inclined to have a talk with you."

"I will go back,—or on to my studio," exclaimed Mr. Marchmont.

"Had you any engagement?"

"I was simply going to the Garners', where I always spend my Sunday evenings."

"We can walk on together. I started with the intention of going there. Then suddenly the idea occurred to me that I should like to talk over certain matters with you."

He stopped short on the curbstone.

"I detest talking about myself," he exclaimed.
"I know myself, but nobody else knows me."

"Count me as a sure friend," said John Marchmont warmly.

"You remember my introduction to Mrs. Garner and her daughter," Garthe went on, plunging into his subject. "You recall how it happened that I was invited to their house. Ferdinand Hartley had spoken of taking me there, but I had declined. With premeditation, by any exercise of my own will, I should not have consented at first. I had simply given up society; it had seemed better to do so. But everything at first seemed accidental, then it seemed inevitable; it had come about without my own intention. I had been blind to the significance of the first event, and after that, I was interested, absorbed, carried along, in spite of myself. Before I knew it I was in love. As soon as I realized that I was in love I might, it is true, have drawn back; but - after all, there was the chance. Now, Mr. Marchmont, I want to tell you, man to man, just how I stand. You are her friend, - you were her father's friend; you can judge for her."

They still stood on the curbstone with the light of the great electric moon above full on their faces. Garthe dashed into his subject, as if conscious that only by a fierce plunge could he be free of the shuddering horror of making the revelation. After he had seen Mr. Marchmont give a start of surprise, heard him utter an exclamation,—perhaps of astonishment, perhaps of indignation,—he was at least free to go on; he had told the worst he could tell of himself, and now that it was uttered he experienced a sensation of relief. Yet a sharp instinct of anxiety made him see something in John Marchmont's face to give him alarm.

"I want all the facts," said the older man briefly. Garthe obeyed. Even with the statement that his wife had been guilty towards him, that she had deserted her helpless child, he was not hard. He did not feel that he had the right. He had been always conscious of a fatal weakness in himself, of haste, of impatience, of possible harshness, which had caused open revolt. He had not, he had gone on feeling all these years, sufficiently measured the temptations to which he had left his wife, little more than a child, exposed. His own shuddering horror of her early surroundings had made him blind to their possible attractions for her. He justified himself in nothing; he made few accusations; rather he seemed too full of pity, almost of tenderness, to inflict a possible wound. He tried to gather his answer from John Marchmont's eyes, but each time their glances encountered he was conscious of a sort of reproach in them.

"Does Constance know?" asked the artist, as Garthe paused.

<sup>&</sup>quot; No."

"Yet you have spoken to her of your" -

"I have told her I loved her; I have told her that I wished to make her my wife. I have told her, too, that I had a painful history."

"A very painful history. I wish you had begun by confessing it clearly."

"So do I," said Garthe in a bitter whisper.

"However," pursued John Marchmont, "I have entire sympathy for you in your reserve."

Garthe clutched his arm.

"Tell me one thing," he exclaimed vehemently.

"Do you consider that this — this accursed thing in my life — separates her from me?"

"No," said John Marchmont. "No; tell her what you have told me, and if she really cares for you—" He broke off. "Let us go on," he added, after a moment's pause. "It is cold here, and we have been standing still too long. We will go there together."

Garthe had not released his companion's arm, and, linked together, they walked on.

"I have wanted to tell her, — but I have put it off. I have thought of writing it, but I wished to see her face when she heard the story. Then, too, before I made any sort of plea to her for sympathy, before I put clearly before her just the sacrifice she would be compelled to make in marrying me, I longed to know just how much of a sacrifice it was, whether it would be too costly, — whether my story, if known, could tarnish her in the world's eye."

"Tarnish her? No!" cried John Marchmont.

"I have had to live with it," pursued Garthe. "I have felt the sting of it, — and I have dreaded it for her. I suppose it is that which gagged me. Then, too, it has all been very brief, very hurried. I—" They had reached the house in Lexington Avenue. Garthe put his hand a moment heavily on his companion's, as they went up the steps together. "I can't tell you what a relief it is," he burst out suddenly, "to have you understand. I owed the explanation to her; I owed it to Mrs. Garner; I owed it to everybody who cares for her, but I shrank from it. Tell me once, in so many words, on your conscience, on your honor, have I or have I not, the right to go in and sit beside her?"

"You have every right," said John Marchmont, moved by Garthe's look, tone, and impetuous, boyish movement.

"To tell her that I want her for my wife?"

"Yes; one cannot but wish it had been different,
—one cannot reason away subtle likes and dislikes.
They belong to the grain of a man's mind. They are a matter of taste, of prepossession, of prejudice,
—yet one knows it is only a matter of taste, prepossession and prejudice. Frankly, I wish you had not been married at all, even happily; but that is an impracticable wish. As it is, I consider that you have been horribly wronged, and with all my heart I shall be glad to see a good, sweet girl make up to you for what you have lost."

"And that is final?" said Garthe.

"That is final."

They went in together. Not only in Garthe, but in John Marchmont as well, a change was perceptible. Each man seemed to see his way made clear; each was conscious of a joyous change which set him free. John Marchmont was at last convinced that Garthe was certainly no rival of his. What Garthe experienced was a different sensation of relief, almost resembling that of an innocent man who has been in danger of being committed for a crime but is suddenly proved to be not only guiltless but himself the injured person. He had hardly known until this moment how he had hated the thought of the dogging shadow on his life, the shadow which might at any moment, like that of the released genie, take increasing size and blacken his whole universe. Yesterday, an hour ago, inseparable from the thought of Constance, had come this menace. Even while he had been almost fiercely ready to vindicate his own attitude, he had been tortured by scruples, by a dread of the world's sharp strictures.

Yet never was opportunity less propitious for a pair of lovers. Instead of finding Kathy and Constance sitting cosily by the fire, hoping some one would come and lighten the burden of the long, dull evening, there was, by chance, a room full of people. In spite of each of the two men being possessed by his own idea, — each feeling himself at a

supreme moment of his destiny, each was compelled to sit down and discuss indifferent subjects; John Marchmont, by some irony of fate, falling to the share of a pretty girl vastly taken with art, who unhesitatingly demanded his opinion of certain pictures in a new exhibition.

- "How did you like the ---?"
- "Excellent upholstery."
- "But so much color, such beautiful textures."
- "Precisely; you know exactly what they are,—silks, satins, and velvets, and how much they cost a yard; I never saw anything more admirably clear."
  - "I am afraid you are not in earnest."
  - "I am profoundly in earnest."
  - "I fancy that you are an impressionist."
  - "Very likely that is it."
- "I myself do not like too much everyday realism, pictures made up of infinite brush strokes, touched and retouched; it may be conscientious work, but I call the effect tedious."
- "'Tedious' is good,—'tedious' is very good indeed."
- "I like the vague tenderness of Browne's canvases."
- "I called it tender vagueness, but we both love the same thing, no doubt."
- "Such extraordinary juggling with effect of color and light."
  - "Extraordinary juggling, indeed!" said John

Marchmont, who was looking at Kathleen, and straining his ears to hear what she was saying to a stranger whose name he had not caught, but in whom she seemed engrossed to a degree which reduced him to despondency. He had believed momentarily that since Garthe was devoted to Constance, he had no rival; but here was another; a man sufficiently young and good-looking, who gazed at Kathy with admiring affection, while she treated him to her prettiest glances and ways, - just those endearing, womanly ways which he had seen her use with Bernard Garner, and which were the spontaneous outcome of real affection, real tenderness. Fresh doubts, jealousies, torments, scruples, honeycombed John Marchmont's peace of mind, and he was further than ever from any mood of belief, hope, or resolution.

Garthe's experience was of a different order. On seeing him Constance had risen, given him her hand; their eyes had met once, and he had discovered in them a half mischievous light, and in the smile which played about her lips he discerned also hidden amusement, a childlike, naïve sense of a secret between them. Thus, even when she addressed him with formality, introduced him to an elderly lady and to a military-looking man, who, evidently tired of each other, turned to him on the instant with some relief, Garthe felt more than ever that there was a bond between them of entire comprehension and sympathy. He at once sat down,

began to talk and listen to his new acquaintances, not looking at Constance, but conscious that she often glanced at him sweetly and confidingly, that she observed all that he said, — smiled, and once laughed outright. Never had he felt so sure of her regard for him as to-night: there was joy, almost pride, in her eyes, in her smile, in the tone of her voice.

He perceived after a time that some of the group were guests who were staying in the house; hence it would be impossible to outsit them: the moment of explanation must again be postponed.

But, surer of himself to-night, he schemed a little for a chance of exchanging one word. He saw her rise, cross the room for an album of photographs, and in a moment he was at her side.

- "Must I go away without a word with you?" he whispered as he reached down for the book.
  - "Is not this a word?"
- "I wanted so much to see you to-night. Shall you be alone to-morrow evening? I wish particularly to see you."
  - "Kathy will be here."
  - "Constance!"
  - " Well?"
- "Say that you will go upstairs and find the book, for it is not here. Then go into the little reception-room. I must say a word to you."
  - "The book is not here, but how can I"-
  - "No matter how, go back, I will follow. I

will take leave; then in a moment, — you will be in the reception-room?"

She said nothing, but her glance told him that she consented. She turned from him — went out; he approached Mrs. Garner, bade her goodnight, bowed to the circle, shook hands with his former companions, gained the hall, then found to his dismay that John Marchmont was following upon his steps.

- "Oh, you are going also," Garthe exclaimed.
- "Why not? It's past half-past ten," said Mr. Marchmont, disconsolate, rather irritable, and altogether worn out. "Come on."
- "In one instant," said Garthe in a low voice, and he turned into the reception-room, where Constance stood, her cheeks aflame.
- "What have I done?" she murmured. "Never should I have dreamed I could do such a thing!"

He gazed at her, absolutely entranced by her beauty.

"But I had to see you; how could I go away without having even met your eyes? Look at me, look at me, Constance," for her glance had fallen before his.

She raised them as he insisted.

- "I came to tell you everything," he murmured. "I had told Mr. Marchmont"—
- "Not to-night," she said, and looked at him with love in her eyes.
  - "But I must tell you one thing," he said passion-

ately, "that I love you,—that I ask you to give me peace,—the peace I can never feel again until you and I are one; at least until you show me that you, too, love me."

He was clasping her, her face was upturned; their eyes met,—then, as his words ceased, their lips; for his, like flame, had leaped to what they coveted.

"Did I keep you too long?" Garthe asked John Marchmont in another moment.

"An eternity," replied the artist. He uttered, as they emerged from the house, a sort of groan. "Oh, youth, youth!" he said, two or three times over, on their way home. Garthe could extract from him no other syllable.

## CHAPTER XIV.

#### LARRY HAS A VISITOR.

THE note of expectation which Garthe had struck sounded all night through Larry's dreams. A vision of something undefined, yet brightening and warming his world, shone for him on waking, like the sun behind a luminous mist.

"Don't talk about it this morning, Larry," his father returned, in answer to his questions and his prattle. "Wait a little."

For Garthe could not put his feelings into words to-day. He was separated from his bliss of the night before by a dream; a terrible - to him at this moment a shameful — dream; a dream which had made him hide his eyes from the day with a feeling as of moral degradation. He had gone to bed happy and light at heart. That kiss, which had had all the clinging, the intensity of passion, had yet satisfied a hunger, a yearning which belonged to the soul more than the senses. It was the expression of what lay vibrating in the man's inmost heart and met its full response. No more than that embrace had been necessary to show Garthe that Constance was his own, his very own. It would not have been possible for any man to be

moved by a more pure and exquisite feeling of happiness than he had felt, as he sank into sleep. Later came the dream.

He had still been thinking of Constance, and he seemed to be awaiting her. His impressions of the time, the scene, the occasion, were hazy and confused, yet he was expecting her; and when he discerned a figure approaching it was his instinct joyfully to advance and meet it; but a paralysis weighed upon him; his limbs seemed to be held in an iron grip. "Come, come," he cried eagerly, "you can reach me although I am bound in chains." A voice answered, "I am coming." At the sound of this voice he experienced a sharp disappointment. It was not the voice of Constance. Still it was a familiar voice, and as it vibrated in his ear a new world of images seemed to rise, and, as in a transformation scene, the waning and waxing shapes mingled for a moment in half confusion, then the old faded into the background and dissolved. Along with this new set of impressions came a strange perplexity and pain. "Is it you, then, Bella?" he asked. For although his sense told him the presence was approaching closer and closer, he could distinguish no personality; it seemed as it loomed up to make him more hopelessly in doubt. It was beside him, it touched him; he became conscious of a convulsion, a passionate pressure, and along with this consciousness of an ever multiplying horror and sting

of trouble and of shame came a trembling joy. "I thought," he said to her as she enfolded him, "that you were not my wife any longer." With some fresh throbbing shock of presentiment, he tried to push her from him, but could not. Even with the feeling that there was some impediment, even while he experienced a cold nightmare of dislike and dread, the constraint of her passion was upon him,—her lips sought his, her heart rested against his. He awoke to hate himself; to feel that life on such terms was become an oppression, a menace. He slept no more,—instead, lay awake thinking of that hideous phantom of the night.

"If only I might hear that she was dead," he said to himself more than once. "One or the other of us needs to die. The earth is not wide enough for both of us."

Thus, although he gradually regained his equilibrium and strength of nerve, he was scarcely in a mood to respond to Larry's questions, and was almost ready to blame himself for having roused these expectations in the boy, since cravings for happiness must be a torment until they are fulfilled.

Larry, however, missed nothing. He carried his new hopes blithely, yet with a proud swelling of the heart, at times conscious of a warm heady feeling about his eyes which made him ready to laugh or to cry. Once, while he was at his lessons, he suddenly looked up, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and smiled.

- "Why do you smile?" asked the little governess to whom he went each day from nine until twelve.
  - "Oh, I was just thinking."
- "But this is not the time for thinking; you are having a lesson on the maps."
  - "I can't help thinking to-day."
  - "How is that? Has anything happened?"
  - "No, but something is going to happen."
  - "Will you tell me what it is?"

He shook his head roguishly.

"It is n't going to happen to anybody else,—only to me," he said. And again he smiled.

He confided the secret to Amelia, however, who understood how to press one question upon another until she gained her object. Her suspicions, indeed, in this direction were always alert. She had always, she said, known that it must happen sooner or later; one could predict nothing else of a fine-looking young gentleman like Mr. Garthe, and of late there had been signs, clear signs, that a change was at hand. Amelia had known, she observed weightily, a few changes for the better and many, alas, for the worse. Naturally, she remembered her own good services to master and boy, and reflected that there might be a falling off; but if the master was pleased and Larry was pleased and God willed it, why, who could speak a

word against it, and she would not predict evil. For Amelia had not the heart to diminish any of Larry's hopes.

The afternoon was cold and dark; now and then flakes of snow fell. The boy could not stay out of doors in such weather, and he wandered aimlessly about the rooms.

"She is to sit there. Papa said so," he observed to Amelia, indicating the pretty blue silk chair before the fire. He tried the springs, nestling against the cushions lovingly. The woman could see in the boy's eyes a coming and going of new and happy thoughts. His lips smiled, little dimples played in his cheeks and chin; his deep gaze, however, had something in it poignant and touching. He was cradled in a dream which was not of any past experience. Yesterday he had comprehended nothing of any need which his father could not answer. To-day, nevertheless, he had a hundred sweet pensive little ideas about a mother. He almost felt that he must cry, but burst out laughing instead.

- "Where will she sit at table?" he asked.
- "Oh, opposite your papa, of course. You will be between them."

Larry went into the dining-room and stood for a time pondering this new phase of the delightful mystery. Amelia, watching the light in his eyes, his face alternately flushing and paling, said within herself that if the child were not to get all he hoped for, it would be a wicked betrayal of confidence.

"And where will she sleep?" he continued.

"Hear the boy! Oh, everything will be newly furnished and made over for the mistress, no doubt. I dare say you will have to give up your playroom and come to the third story hall-bedroom. You'll gain in some ways, no doubt. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, but you're sure to lose something. You will no longer be the first object."

"She may have my playroom," said Larry with a swelling heart. "She may have all my playthings. I will give her my Swiss cow."

"Oh, she's sure to have a fine time, with the master pouring out money like water before her."

Larry did not hear her. This duality of destiny of which he was suddenly conscious laid its obligation upon him. He took immense delight in the thought of his possessions, and went upstairs to survey them. He mentally resigned them, retaining not even the locomotive engine, tremulously handing them over in imagination to the new claimant.

"I wish she would come now," he murmured to himself.

He had all that he had possessed hitherto, yet it was not enough. Even the Skye and the Angora seemed also to be waiting and expecting something. Fido yawned, whined, and stretched himself; even Mou-mou was uneasy. All three wandered restlessly about the house, paying visits to Amelia, into whose ears Larry poured every fresh fancy and surmise. Now and then he stopped short and meditated; some fresh thought had offered itself, and perhaps some important question had to be decided upon, before he could even speak to Fido, who at such moments was apt to sit up on his hind legs and put up his front paws and beg. At such times Fido had a very droll air, as his hair was sure to be in his eyes, and his whole aspect imbecile and not in the least like that of a sensible dog. The Angora was never foolish like the Skye terrier; even if she shut her eyes entirely she looked wiser and wiser.

What seemed strange to Larry was that he had never asked his father to do this wonderful thing. He had known that his father was in the secret of everything, could do anything no matter how marvelous, and yet he had never asked it. He was glad now that the miraele had happened without his praying for it. It gave him a sense of the illimitable goodness of everybody. He experienced a sense of exaltation.

The rooms were dull and dark. He went to the front windows, pushed away the curtains, and looked out, Fido also climbing to his side on the window-seat. The tops of the opposite houses seemed as tall as the sky, for there was no real sky to-day; above the roofs the strip of heaven that

showed was heavy with clouds, dark and threatening. The few people who hurried along on foot bent their heads dumbly and took the bleak wind which blew from river to river. Now and then a confectioner's or a fish-monger's cart rattled by, stopping somewhere within view to leave delicacies for some of the neighbors' dinners. Larry's thoughts varied from the lofty to the prosaic. occurred to his mind that perhaps when the new mamma came they would have dainties every day. They would have to do their best to please her, and he imagined her as liking sweets as much as he himself did. He was radiant with high spirits. He wished he could talk to Fido and Mou-mou, for Button had by this time come in and was sitting before the kitchen fire, fast asleep, and Amelia held up a warning finger if Larry intruded.

His happiness was so great, however, that Amelia and Button could not add to it, or take it away. He even felt magnanimous when he saw that the confectioner was leaving half a dozen ice-cream freezers at Fred Conover's house. Still, as Fred might not know the great happiness which had befallen Larry himself, he might be thinking that he was a lonely boy, since they were evidently going to have a party, and it was a pity he should be deceived.

Closed carriages with ladies inside passed at intervals, and stopped before a house at the end of the block, where people lived who gave receptions to their friends every Monday. Larry's eyes followed

one after the other, expecting to see them all stop at the same door. Presently, however, a very pretty stylish coupé with one horse went past very slowly, and halted a little way beyond, in an irresolute sort of fashion. Apparently the driver did not know exactly where he was to go; but there, yes, he had started his horse and driven on, not however, to the corner house. This was perplexing, but it was something to think about, - anything would do to wonder about, since nothing was to happen before his father came home. The air was full of great flakes of snow. He tried to open the window and put out his hand and catch one, but could not undo the fastening. He was standing on the cushions of the window-seat, when he saw directly in front of the house a very pretty lady looking up. She stood quite still; gazed at him, put up her veil, and nodded and smiled. Who could it be? For a moment, as he gazed back at her, he quite forgot all that had been in his mind that day. Suddenly it flashed back upon him. Could it be she? Had she come? His papa had said she was coming. This lady was smiling and nodding. There, she beckoned, went nearer the steps and pointed to the He ran into the hall, eagerly pushed aside the latch, turned the knob, and opened the door, although in general it was a feat beyond his strength.

There she was, on the threshold, inside the vestibule, and still smiling; a very grand and beautiful lady dressed in velvet and fur and laces. "What is your name?" she asked in a very soft voice, coming straight up to the threshold and looking at him earnestly.

"Lawrence Courtenay Garthe."

She took the little rosy face between her two hands, looked down at him with a laughing glance, and kissed him on the forehead, the eyes, the lips. Then she drew back and gazed at him a moment in silence. He had grown a little pale; his eyes, which met hers, were bright and shining.

"Can you guess who I am?" she asked.

He had to draw a long breath before he could speak. He was stifled by some strange feeling.

"Is it my mamma?" he gasped, trembling from head to foot.

She uttered an exclamation.

"What makes you think I am your mamma?" she demanded.

"Papa told me you were coming."

She gazed at the child in sudden dismay, feeling as if entrapped, caught in meshes she could not undo. She experienced a momentary reaction from the impulse, partly of mischief, partly of audacity, which had brought her to this house, and longed to run away.

She had come with the intention of planting, if possible, a ghost of the past in Lawrence Garthe's present; she longed to spoil his felicity. How dared he live and be happy, as if he had neither part nor lot with her?

- "Is your papa at home?" she now inquired almost brusquely.
  - "No, papa will not be home till six o'clock."
  - "Then I will come in and see you."
- "Are you really my mamma?" Larry inquired, red and white chasing each other in his face.
- "Yes," she returned, with a shrill laugh. "I am really your own mamma. The only mamma you have in all the world. Do be good and ask her in out of the snow-storm."

He drew a long breath and stood looking at her, smiling and blushing with intense pride and joy, yet half shamefaced, conscious of being kept at a distance, of being thwarted in some expectation. He was so absorbed in his own emotions that she herself had to draw him inside and shut the door, then lead the way into the room, where a fire was burning. She glanced round, half defiant and half shy as she entered the place, bracing herself against the ordeal of some possible encounter. But the library was empty, and with a feeling of relief and exultation she sank into the blue chair before the hearth.

Larry had hold of her hand, and now stood gazing at her humbly and passionately.

"Oh, mamma," he said in a voice like a sob.

She flung down her muff and drew him within the circle of her arms, experiencing an odd sort of shyness. He leaned against her shoulder, smoothing the soft fine sable which trimmed her cloak. They were face to face, and she studied him with thoughtful, inquisitive eyes, perhaps trying to make out some resemblance to herself, or to his father. This sense of nearness, this deep strange look bent on him, filled the little fellow with the most poignant emotion. She drew him on her lap, pressed his supple form to her breast, embraced him, and their lips met.

"Oh, my mamma," whispered Larry. He burst into a passion of weeping. He knelt on her knees, put his arms round her neck, and nestled his head under the cheek, against the warm white throat.

"Why do you cry?" she asked, as he still sobbed.

"Because I am so happy you have come, mamma."

"How did you feel so sure that I was your mamma?" she asked, and she, too, was under the thrill of emotion.

"Papa said you were coming," Larry returned, withdrawing a little, in order to gaze at her the better. How beautiful she was; how rich and dark her hair and eyebrows; how bright her eyes, and how lovely the color on her cheeks and lips! How grand she was too, with the velvet and fur and the gold ornaments on her bonnet! His head was dizzy with the warmth and fragrance of the breast he leaned against. "He did not say you would come to-day, but I hoped you would come, and I thought you would come," he went on,

pleased with this evidence of his own sagacity. "Papa only said you would come soon."

"And you wanted to see me?"

"Oh, yes, I have been thinking about it ever since I got up this morning. I did not tell Miss Brown, and I did not tell the boys when I was out at noon. But I thought of it all the time, and Amelia and I have been talking about it. I told her you were coming."

To be expected, waited for, welcomed, gave her a feeling of bewilderment, almost of humiliation. Then she began to piece together detached fancies and ideas, and enlightenment dawned gradually. It was not she herself whom the child had been taught to prepare a welcome for, but that other woman. In a rage with Garthe, with the boy, with herself, and with her life, she half pushed him away, as that spectre came between them, the intolerable sense returning, that after all, in spite of her wealth, her independence, nothing actually belonged to her. Had this child and this child's father, this room with its signs of habitation and occupation, ever been a possible part of her living world of possessions and ideas, - where now such a gulf of distance must yawn between them and her? Then as in a flash she found herself again in high spirits. After all, the boy was hers. That fact could not be altered by any decree, human or divine. She could intrench herself in a mother's prerogative, which rests on natural law, instinct,

fate. Even if Garthe had another wife sitting in this very chair, Larry could not be her child. She was conscious that her heart was beating with some indefinable agitation, yet exultation welled up within her. She was well within her rights. Nobody with a heart could alienate Larry from her. The triumphant realization of her ability to inflict pain, to put obstacles in the way of Garthe's security and happiness, grew, and as she took in the irony of the situation, she laughed aloud.

"What did your papa say about your mamma?" she inquired.

"That you were coming to live with us," stammered Larry. "He said we had been so lonely, but that God was good, and that we were never, never to be lonely any more. He made me promise I would be good to you, mamma!" He uttered a little gurgle of a laugh. "I shall be so glad to be just as good as I know how."

She smiled at him, then in a slow, luminous fashion, which in itself gave the boy a thrill and tingle of feeling, drew him into her embrace, and half stifled him with kisses. Her love of dominating, of conquering, of concentrating everything upon herself, made her eager to appropriate this treasure of fresh, unspent and abounding love; herself to put the mint mark on it, to deny it another possible claimant, to despoil that other woman. Then, too, there was the joy of wresting the affections of the child from its father.

- "You do love me, don't you, Larry?" she said archly.
  - "Oh, mamma, I love you dearly."
  - "You will tell your papa you love me?"

Larry laughed. "He wants me to love you."

- "If he should ever say that you must not love me, that you must love somebody else; if he were to tell you I was a wicked woman,—that I must go away,—you will still love me, will you not?"
  - "I bet I will," said Larry, laughing still more.
- "For I really am your mother. Nobody else can be your own mamma. They may smile, they may kiss you, they may seem to be kind, but you will know it is all a pretense. You will see that they are only making believe; but this is not making believe."

Again she let her passion encircle him and overpower him like a flood. His senses were confused by the warm and fragrant kisses, and he was under the spell of her beautiful, terrible eyes. Alternately he quaked with a sort of ecstatic fear and screamed with laughter. Half sweet although it was, it was half annihilating; he felt carried along he knew not whither.

- "You see I love you," she said, drawing back and letting her glance travel over his face. "You will tell your papa that I love you and that you love me dearly."
  - "Oh, yes, I will tell him."
  - "You see, dear," she cooed persuasively, "I

have n't had you in my arms since you were almost a baby. You were a fine little fellow then, but now you are quite a man. Let me see how tall you are!"

He sprang down and stood at a little distance on his round straight legs, and looked at her, rosy and dimpling, anxious for approval.

"Oh, you are a splendid boy," she said admiringly. "Let me see, how old are you? Seven last May?"

"I shall be eight next birthday," he answered, looking at her with love unbounded.

"And so well-grown, so straight, such slender little feet and ankles! Let me see your hands and feel your arms! Oh, you're beautiful. I'm proud of you." Again she devoured him with kisses. "Tell me about yourself. Do you have lessons? Can you read?"

He blushed and turned pale alternately. At moments this love grew oppressive, intolerable; his head seemed whirling round. Still this tangible evidence that he was beloved was precious; it made everything more real. His felicity gathered meaning, too, from her beauty, from the sensation of ecstatic but mute delight which he experienced under her glance. Strength and power and beauty seemed crystallized in her, and he was a mere atom under her control. It was a relief to have a moment to collect his thoughts, to regain, as it were, possession of himself, and answer her

questions. His tongue once unloosed, he poured out every idea which came into his mind. He introduced Fido, who had been undergoing agonies of jealousy and chagrin at the presence of this intruder. Mou-mou was on her cushion asleep, - she was always asleep, - and she seemed always, if she were awake, to be a little disdainful of the world and consider it not worth a cat's attention. It was Amelia who usually took care of him; Button, however, sometimes put him to bed and dressed him in the morning. Papa took him to school at nine o'clock and Button came for him at twelve. He learned all sorts of things; he could model, draw, print, and even read a little; he knew figures too, and maps. These were his new boots. See, what splendid soles! He had quite outgrown his old ones; they pinched him. He had a new winter coat with three capes, and a cap of the same stuff. Amelia's canary bird would eat sugar from his lips, and chirped whenever he went into the kitchen. Sometimes Mou-mou would look at the bird, opening and shutting her yellow eyes, and sheathing and unsheathing her claws as if she would like to get nearer that cage. And papa was teaching him Latin in the evenings, and at breakfast they always talked French. Love his papa! He loved him as much, - as much as the sun, moon, and stars put together.

While he prattled on he thought it odd but very droll and delightful that she interrupted him with little teasing and jesting questions. She smiled, her lips parted and showed now and then her pretty, even teeth. A deeper sense of her beauty came upon him every time she moved and turned. She had thrown off her wraps one by one,—the cape of sable, the long cloak of velvet, the many-buttoned gloves, and at every fresh revelation of the full, rounded figure, the little hands covered with rings, the brooch studded with diamonds at her throat, his heart swelled with ecstasy to think that this beautiful creature was his own, own mother.

"Mamma, mamma," he burst out almost sobbing, he was so profoundly, so intensely proud of her.

She had been glancing about the room, and now, jumping up, began to look at the pictures and the books with which the place was strewn. She lifted here and there one of the Greek figurines, a vase, a bit of brass or cloissonné. She sat down before the desk and turned over the papers on the blotter, glanced at a pile of letters in a silver étui, even peeped into the pigeon-holes. While she was thus rummaging, Larry saw, with the same feeling of terror and admiration he had more than once felt. that her face grew strange, eager, and imperious. The idea of her not being pleased was like a blow on the tender little heart. He was conscious of the defiant restless spirit which shone in her eyes; that she seemed to be looking for something which should satisfy some hungry instinct. He wondered what it could be. There was a pile of manuscript which she turned over with a curling lip, - proofsheets; they did not rouse her curiosity. It might have seemed as if she longed to conjure up something, that she felt the presence of something antagonistic, something upon which she longed to pounce, and devour without remorse or scruple. After a while, perhaps convinced that there was nothing to be found, perhaps put to shame by Larry's eyes, which grew wider and wider with surprise, she laughed to herself, turned, and as if demanding an outlet for her superfluous fire and energy, she began to play with the boy. An imp-like feeling of defiance, of resolution to do all that she might and to treat everything as her own, to wrest the rights of possession out of dispossession, assailed her every moment more and more strongly. She caught up a set of carved ivory balls which she began to toss like a juggler; then when she could not keep them in air, she pelted Larry with them recklessly; she chased him up and down the room, brought him to bay on the lounge, and pretended to smother him with cush-Her cheeks grew more and more rosy, her eyes brighter and brighter, her smile more mischievous. She asked him if he knew how to dance, and, finding him uninstructed, gave him a lesson, - then all at once stopped short in a pirouette and held up her finger.

"Hush," she said, "what is that?" She heard a click at the door.

"That is papa," the boy cried in a rapture of joy. "Papa, papa!" He ran into the hall and

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threw himself into his father's arms the moment he crossed the threshold. "She has come," he cried triumphantly.

- "Who has come?" asked Lawrence Garthe.
- "You told me she was coming,—I knew her in a moment."
  - "Who is it?" demanded Garthe, startled.
  - "Why, mamma! Of course, it is mamma."

## CHAPTER XV.

## A DREAM COME TRUE.

It had grown darker. Amelia, who had not been long in making the discovery of so unusual a circumstance as Larry's having a feminine visitor, and puzzled besides by the stray fragments of conversation which floated to her ears as she lingered about the hall and the dining-room, had not lighted the gas. Accordingly, when Garthe—whose instinctive guess could only be that Constance and probably Mrs. Garner had come to see Larry—advanced to the door of the library, he could discern only the dim outlines of the figure of a youthful and symmetrical woman, relieved by the background of the fire. Her features he could not make out at all.

"This is very good of you," he began in a voice which was husky, for his heart was beating fast.

At the same instant, Amelia, advancing behind him, lighted the hanging lamp in the hall, making a dazzling illumination which streamed into the library, not fully penetrating it, but focusing its brightness in one place while deepening the shadows elsewhere. Garthe, advancing, saw just clearly enough to wrest a sharp presentiment out of his thickly gathering crowd of impressions. His mind reverted to his dream of the night before. No, that was incredible, impossible!

With the idea of Constance encompassing him wherever he went, it had at first not seemed strange that she should be here. In all ways her goodness to him had been little short of miracle, and this would be but an added instance. That hope was still his defense, all that he had to help him to contend against a thousand fears. They—vague, shadowy, problematical,—gathered like birds of ill omen out of the black gulf which suddenly seemed to open before him. Again he felt the oppression, the horror of his nightmare repeat itself, suffocating him and clogging his limbs. He could not move; he stood perfectly still and gazed into the shadow.

Larry, as if conscious that he was no longer a chief actor, stood by, a spectator of events, full of an agitation which was half alarm and half hope. The silence seemed to him terrible.

Little by little, as Garthe stood peering into the gloom, feeling as if life were suspended, doubt became suspicion, suspicion became certainty. His forces came back with a sense of meeting a crisis, of doing battle with an enemy.

"Who is this?" he demanded, in a low, stern voice.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Bella," she answered.

<sup>&</sup>quot;My God!"

He advanced a step more, drew a match from his pocket, struck it across the heel of his boot, touched the jets in the chandelier and flooded the room with light.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

He could see her clearly now, bright and alert, with something in her eyes disdainful, almost fierce.

"I wanted to see my child," she said with pride and decision. "He is my child as much as he is yours, let you rob me of him as you may."

The two stood looking at each other. Garthe's thin face had grown pale; his eyes seemed dull; they had a giddy, dazed look; his closely folded lips expressed almost a giving way to despair.

She, too, had changed color, but in a way to put her at her best. At this moment, under the stimulus of a mixture of emotions, she was beautiful.

"You are the woman I saw at the opera with Hartley," he said quietly. "Although I could not see your face, an indefinable resemblance haunted me. The color of your hair has changed."

"Yes," she exclaimed, with a half laugh, "my hair used to be reddish gold when you knew me. It might be rather a pleasant experience to turn brunette after being a blonde, if the change would only go deep enough. But nothing has really changed me. I am the same old Bella, after all. I cannot get another brain, —I cannot get another heart." She laughed again, a dreary little laugh.

In the ferment of impressions which tested Garthe's self-control, what most made him flinch was the familiarity of every tone of her voice, every turn and twist of expression which showed her mental make-up.

His predominant feeling was of the outrage she had committed in coming to his house. Yet why had he been so blind, why had he permitted himself and Larry to run the risk of meeting this terrible enemy? For she was a terrible, an invincible enemy, — an enemy before whom he must lay down his arms. Let him try as he might to be angry, to work himself up into a rage, he knew that such wrath was impotent. It was of no use to be angry. This was Fate, inexorable, appalling, insisting on the eternal sequence of human actions, the unity of cause and effect. If he had strength for unreasoning rage, let him turn it against himself, against his own fatuity in expecting anything for his portion except black despair.

He had suffered before, but not like this. That was the beginning, this was the end.

Still, what he said was, speaking in the lowest possible voice, "You must go away. You have no right here. No, you have no right."

Larry, looking into his face, watching the stern unchanging features, and seeing that everything was somehow going strangely wrong, uttered a cry.

"Oh, papa," he said, with a quivering, appealing accent, "do not say that. Do not be cruel to my

mamma. You told me she would come; you told me to be good to her; I was looking out for her; I was wishing with all my heart that she would come, and she came. And I love her, — I love her so much."

If anything could better have set the bitter irony of all his hopes clearly before Garthe, it must have been just these words. The contrast between the mother he had yesterday described to the child, pure as one of Raphael's Madonnas, and this woman sent straight up from the Prince of Darkness, without feeling, without pity, still crowned and triumphant, was too hideous to be borne.

"What I cannot understand," he said inflexibly, "is why you should come here,—how you could dare to come here."

"Larry is my child," she returned.

"The child whom you deserted, — flung aside as a useless incumbrance."

"Nevertheless," said Bella, with a thrill in her voice, "the child I have remembered and longed for. Think for a moment, Lawrence; try to understand that a woman may throw away the choicest gifts of life and then a little later wake up to see the blind fool that she was, the senseless thing she was, the shameless thing she was." She paused a moment and, as if to try the effect of her words upon him, seemed to be waiting for him to speak; then went on: "Then when she knows that she has forever shut herself out of heaven, can't you ima-

gine the necessity she is under of crawling on her hands and knees to the gates and looking in? I only expected to walk by your house this afternoon. It was something to find out where you lived,—where my child lived. And there he was at the window,—he saw me; did you not, Larry? He seemed to know me by instinct, just as I knew him. He seemed to be watching and waiting for me. He ran to the door to let me in!"

Larry, who had listened to this vindication with a mute delight, burst out, "You had told me, you know, papa, that mamma was coming, and I said to myself, 'Perhaps she will come to-day,' and there she was."

A crimson flush had risen to Garthe's face.

"I should have supposed," he observed quietly, "that if in all New York there was a house you longed to avoid, to flee from the sight of, it would be the house where I lived."

"You don't know me! You have no idea how a woman clings," cried Bella, as if stung by his tone. "But I will go away. I can at least walk up and down outside in the cold and darkness and think that you and Larry are within, warm, comfortable, and happy."

This cruel suggestion struck the child like a blow. He set up a cry.

"Must I go?" she said, taking a step forward and addressing Garthe as if he were a stony-hearted judge.

He made a gesture as if waiving the question, and walked out of the room. What he experienced was a sense that everything in his universe had fallen into a condition of chaos, -a chaos against which his soul revolted. The impression was strong upon him that she was not sincere, — that she was acting a part, that she had some purpose of her own to attain. Perhaps she wanted money; most probably she wanted money. His mind recurred to what Hartley had said of her wealth, but no doubt that was the fiction imposed upon the world by a bold adventuress. What else could she have come for except money? His thoughts hovered uneasily round this question, never quite settling upon a clear hypothesis. What he was certain of was her egotism, her caprice, her indifference to anything save her own appointed end. She knew too, that, let him loathe her as he might, let him be shocked, startled, outraged, he would work her no ill. All she had to do was to plant herself in his path and he would part with anything he possessed save the boy, to get rid of her.

"Yes, she wants more money," he said, imposing the formula upon himself as if it carried with it a sort of relief. But it was a mere formula. At heart he cared for nothing except the fact of her existence; the fact that he had believed that he had forever escaped from her, but that he had not escaped from her, — that he never could escape

from her. He could no more escape this implacable enemy than he could escape from his own identity. She was forever a part of himself. He had married her; she had been his wife; she was Larry's mother. Whether she were true or false, repentant or callous, whether she had come out of levity and idleness or with a purpose, whether she were a loving mother or a heartless mother, it did not alter the fact of her existence. It could not be reasoned away; it was no matter of selection, of choice, even of equity and of law. Divorce affected nothing but the superficial outside situation. He had, eight years before, honestly chosen her for his wife, and nothing could alter that fact. could no more take her out of his life, undo the circumstance of her being Larry's mother, than he could himself enter again into his mother's womb and be born anew.

The fetters were upon him; he could not wrestle, he could not attempt to shake off the bondage. He was again a captive, — a captive without hope of release.

He stood in the hall, rooted to the floor.

Button came up and inquired whether he should tell Amelia to serve dinner.

Garthe started, stared. Button repeated the question.

"Oh, yes, serve dinner if it is ready."

"Will the lady stay?"

"I think it probable. Set a place for her."

Garthe's tone was so quiet, Button was reassured. Perhaps after all the incident was not so startling as it had seemed.

Garthe took a turn in the hall, with his hand pressing his forehead. It seemed to him he was the slave of the events which compelled him against his free choice.

"Yet a man must be very fastidious indeed if he cannot sit down to a meal with the woman he has married and made the mother of his offspring," he said almost audibly, smitten by a sense of the irony of things.

There lay the sting for him, and for her there was the undeniable fact which made her defeat a victory, her humiliation a triumph. He could not permit the recollection to burn into Larry's mind, to become a part of his lifelong consciousness, that his mother had come as a suppliant and been cast out. No, that must not be. Better any sacrifice. And after all, it could do no harm, - the harm was done years ago; the shame, the intolerable disgrace of it had been a part of the world's record for six years. Let her stay, - Larry would be sleepy presently; he would be put to bed. Then for five minutes' clear and concise questioning and pressing to the point of finding out the object of this visit, and she should be dismissed. If she were to be bought off, he would buy her off. If her intention was simply to humiliate, thwart, and hinder his life, he would again take Larry and put the "unplumbed salt estranging seas" between him and her.

He went back to the library.

Bella was sitting in the low chair before the fire, with Larry kneeling on her lap. His hands rested on her shoulders, his little cherub face was all alive with light. He was telling her about his locomotive engine.

"I'll get it and show it to you, mamma," he was saying as his father entered.

"Wait until after dinner, Larry," said Garthe quietly. "Now we will go out to table."

Bella gave him a humble, grateful glance.

"Do you mean that I —" she faltered.

"Dinner is ready. Larry shall take you out to dinner."

His composure, his absolute calmness, seemed to strike her powerfully. She remembered him as a young fellow of twenty-three or four, at first her puppet, then a man in the meshes of a net, striking out recklessly to free himself. This was a development which stirred curiosity, almost awe. He felt her glance and turned away. She smiled to herself, put Larry down on the floor, and rose to her feet.

"I will take off my bonnet," she said, emulating Garthe's composure, and with a pretty woman's instinct glancing round for a mirror.

"Here is a glass in this cabinet," he said, stepping back. His eyes lingered on her as she stood

regarding her own image, giving a touch to the light curls about her forehead, and settling her brooch more securely at her throat. She was at once so familiar and so strange to his perception! When he had last seen her she had been a slim, lithe young creature, with an arch face which gained piquancy from its contrast of dark eyes and eyebrows and golden hair. Now her figure had rounded, her hair had grown dark, and the whole woman had gained symmetry and, perhaps, beauty. She had on a gown of black satin, touched here and there with a bead of jet, which fitted her form as if moulded upon it. At her throat was a heavy bar of gold studded with diamonds. Both hands glittered with rings, but they were the same slender, pretty hands she had had as a girl; indeed she had, except for the deepened tint of her hair, changed very little.

She could see in the mirror that his eyes rested on her, and she did not turn away until he had looked his fill. Then she stepped forward, her cheeks crimson. A feeling of intense exultation, boundless, intoxicating, had swept through her as she felt his gaze. After all, she had been his first love, and that sort of man, she said within herself, is constant by instinct, by habit, by the very limitations of his mind. Who knew what might drift up from the unknown? She predicted nothing, expected nothing. She would not adopt any settled plan of action, only try to be sufficient to the mo-

ment, to meet the event, — to miss nothing through want of pliancy or tact.

She put her hand in Larry's to be led out to the table. The moment his eyes fell on the cover laid at Garthe's right hand he burst out, "Oh, papa, may not mamma sit next to me?"

"Wherever you please, my little son."

The table was small and round; Button changed the place, and drew a chair opposite to that of his master. She seemed to hesitate; then, raising her eyes to Garthe's with a look of mute gratitude, she sat down. He glanced back, apparently with absolate indifference.

"I want you where I can put my hand on you, mamma," said Larry. "I want to feel your gown. It is so soft, and it shines like stars. You said she would wear pretty gowns, papa."

Garthe's face was impenetrable. He seemed neither to see the pleading expression of the eyes raised to his face, nor to hear Larry's words. Bella had nevertheless a triumphant consciousness that, let him command himself as he might, he could never be indifferent. She knew the passionate nature of the man too well to believe he could look at her coldly; whether towards hatred or towards love, she was sure somehow to move him. Then, too, he was full of penetration and insight, he was never dull, never inattentive, never forgetful. Audaeious although she tried to be, she was still a little frightened,—under the thrill of a conviction that something

momentous was happening. And he! He was certain to be conscious of her nearness. They were face to face, — nothing between them save a yard or so of table, with a dish of oranges and hothouse grapes in the centre.

They had sat in just this same way before, and with Larry between them, but with a difference. The nicety of the appointments of this dinner-table, the extreme care bestowed on each detail of the service, was an index of the man. His fastidiousness, his irrational standards, his dislike of disorder, confusion, makeshifts, had been the first entering wedge which had finally separated them. His requirements had always suggested an experience of which she was jealous. Now with her present enlargement of knowledge she understood him better. She wondered of what he was thinking; of what could he be thinking except of her? No clear line of demarcation between past and present could exist while they sat here face to face. And in that past he had been her puppet, her suppliant, regarding her smiles and frowns as the uncertain glory of an April day, loving her when she yielded, better still when she showed him invincible caprice.

Garthe's grip upon himself was the result of antagonistic impulses. He was certainly in no danger of forgetting that this was the travesty of the old situation, throwing upon everything that had happened since a garish light of mockery. But his personal feeling of outrage and indignity was

subordinated to other needs of the moment. Larry, bashful but swelling with pride, felt himself to be the hero of the hour; for, kindled by Bella's quick sympathy, he talked incessantly, turning occasionally to his father to draw him into the rapid dialogue. Bella as well was caught up by the spirit of the moment into something resembling gayety, then would check herself and glance over at the quiet figure opposite with the clearly cut face and indomitable eyes.

He was conscious of her least sentence, of every play of feature. He knew what the old Bella had been; naïve, excitable, restless, loving tropical sensation, with a vanity which hindered any real development. He had at first seen in the girl's mobility and quick intelligence high promise. What he had found incalculable was her lack of heart, her revolt against any course of action which hindered her free play. He had easily come to believe that she had never cared for himself. Had she loved the man for whom she had deserted him? She was the kind of woman for whom he would have predicted swift deterioration. Had she stood still? Can a man or woman stand still, - without either rising or falling? How was it possible for a woman, after breaking every tie and obligation, not to have declined? Yet the more he looked at her. the more she seemed to him subdued, softened, developed. Heaven keep him from any knowledge of what her experiences had been, but at all events

she showed at this moment the dignity, the soft feminine charm he had missed in the old days. She was far handsomer than as a girl, but this beauty and fuller symmetry came from good living and careful grooming. It was clear that she at least understood her own advantages, had herself well in hand, -could it be possible that she was a little coquettish? Did she perhaps dream of resubjugating him? The sudden fit of savage feeling that swept over him came in part from a perception that what has once been a man's ruling motive must be eternally his ruling fate, - that actually a man loves once, just as he is born once and dies once; that passion once experienced, even when it becomes the most accursed of recollections, is never quite extinct. Why had he suffered this woman to stay in his house? Why had he been moved to think that she had developed, grown better, when all she could have learned must be the better how to pretend?

"Is n't this nice, papa?" said Larry, seeing the cloud thicken on his father's brow, and trying to draw him into the talk.

"Very nice for me," Bella hastened to say as Garthe remained silent. "You and your papa have each other every day."

"But we did n't use to have you every day, mamma," said Larry.

"I cannot feel that you missed me," Bella sighed; then asked, "How long have you lived here?"

Larry looked eagerly at his father.

"Since last June,—at least, I bought the house then," said Garthe.

At this breaking of the silence on his father's part, Larry smiled with ineffable self-content, feeling that his desire was accomplished. With his head on one side like a sagacious parrot, he went on repeating his father's words and explaining that they did not live there in the summer, but went elimbing high mountains, sailing in ships, and swimming in seas. At first he was afraid to go into the water, although he had seen little babies in the canal tied to a board, — then his papa had taken him in his strong arms and had walked with the waves coming up about them, and he had liked it. "There is nobody like papa," he said, beaming, "he is so strong and so sure."

"I know," murmured Bella, "there is nobody like your papa."

Garthe made a restless movement.

"Up in the mountains," continued Larry, "he put a little wheel in a brook, which went round and round under a waterfall. There is nothing my papa cannot do."

"I know," said Bella, "there is nothing your

papa cannot do."

She looked at the face opposite, which showed at this moment nothing but imperious disdain.

"You mix everything up, Larry," he said

"You talk of what happened in Europe as if we were there last summer."

"Let him tell me all he can. I know so little," she said with an imploring accent.

She plied the boy with questions. What did he like best? When and how was he happiest? Was he always well and strong?

No; once, Larry said, he had been very ill; he had to lie in bed, although it burned him; he could not keep his head still; oh, it was terrible! Then his father took him in his arms and walked and sang to him and put him in comfortable places, and at last he felt quiet and could get little naps, and if he woke up there was his father close beside him.

"He kept sitting there for a whole week,—or was it a month, papa?" said Larry triumphantly. "And when I woke up he would say, 'You are getting well fast, Larry,' and I would say, 'Yes, I'm getting well fast.' You were glad, were n't you, papa, that I got well?"

Garthe nodded and put down his hand on the little hand extended towards him.

"Some boys don't get well," Larry explained with significance to Bella. "There was Robby Vandam I used to play with. One day he had to be sent home from school and he never came back any more. They said he choked up and could n't breathe, though they cut a hole in his throat."

"Don't tell such dreadful things," said Bella with a shudder. Her eye met Garthe's, and she felt as if he read in her face that whole miserable story of her losing her little girl baby by diphtheria, — Danvers-Carr's child; and although her look pleaded with him for forgiveness, his said that he had not forgiven, that he would not forgive.

Illusion gained ground rapidly in her mind, nevertheless. Any one looking on, she said to herself, might think that they were making an experiment to discover whether their alienation were hopeless, whether their solicitude for the child might not be strong enough to shape their future lives. She laid herself out more and more to please Larry. At dessert she tempted him to draw his chair close to hers. She laid the little head against her shoulder, she kissed him, laughed in his face when his eyes melted with delicious languor. When she saw Garthe flush and straighten himself uneasily, she knew that she had touched him to the quick. Oh, to make him jealous! She expended all her sweetness on the child; she could well afford to risk some coquetry, show all her power of pleasing.

"He is asleep," said Garthe suddenly in a harsh voice.

"Yes, he is asleep," she returned, and then leaned her cheek against the boy's temple, mute.

The two were alone. Button had left the room. For a moment there was silence. Then Garthe

pushed back his chair, rose, and went round the table.

"I will take him," he said.

She looked up, and he looked down. Her face showed a conflict of feelings, his was cold and grave.

"Must be go?" she asked with a long-drawn sigh.

" Yes."

But she would not aid him by the least movement. The boy lay heavily against her breast, her arm was round him, his hand in hers. Her fearless eyes interrogated Garthe's as he bent towards her, but his did not make response. He looked like a man claiming his own. Very dexterously and very tenderly, at least where the child was concerned, he continued to draw the burden away from her. One might have seen strange pathos in the situation: mother and child come together by strange accident from the ends of the earth for an hour, then separated by this remorseless fate; all this love, sweetness, clinging need, was to disappear and leave no trace.

"Let me kiss him once more," said Bella. She embraced the child in his father's clasp. Garthe was conscious of a distinct and increasing pressure of her hand and arm upon his own hand and arm.

He no longer delayed, but, lifting the recumbent figure to his shoulder, carried the little fellow out of the room. Amelia was in the hall.

"Shall I put him to bed, sir?" she asked.

"Yes, I will carry him up myself."

At the top of the flight he paused and waited for Amelia.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed breathlessly, "has she come to carry him off?"

All the blood rushed to Garthe's face.

"Carry him off? Not while I am alive."

"Is she really his mother, sir?"

"She is." He paused a moment, then went on.
"It is better that you should understand the facts. I married her when I was twenty-three. In two years she left me for another man. There was a divorce."

The woman vented a sigh of relief.

"She is not going to stay here and live with you, then?"

"Stay here?" a whirlwind of anger crossed his face. "How can you speak of such a thing?"

"It is a terribly stormy night, sir," suggested Amelia, with a manner of peculiar significance. "Button was saying there was a deep drift of snow already up to the doorstep."

Garthe reflected a moment.

"I suppose Button is going out."

"Yes, sir, after a little."

"Tell him to send a carriage here,—a good, close carriage with two horses; at once, as soon as possible. But no,—here, take the boy, Amelia; I will speak to Button myself."

Garthe plunged down the staircase. His mood was combative. If for an hour he had not asserted his right to put distance between Larry and this woman, any hesitation, any indecision, was now at an end. Out of sheer tenderness for the boy, out of a dread of defining the situation too clearly, of striking some jarring chord which might hurt the boy all his life, he had abstained. He did not yet regret it, but perhaps he had made a mistake. The feeling was strong upon him now that he must make no more mistakes.

When he reached the lower floor he saw that Bella had left the dining-room and now stood just over the threshold of the library, as if afraid to advance. Garthe walked along the hall, summoned Button from the pantry, and told him to go for a carriage. Then without a moment's pause he entered the library and closed the door from the dining-room behind him.

She still stood as if uncertain of the event.

"Am I to be sent away?" she asked, moving a step nearer him, and looking at him intently. Garthe halted at a pace's distance from her.

"Button will go for a carriage," he said quietly. "Before it comes I wish you to tell me what object you had in coming here. I am anxious to know."

"Was it so strange I should wish to come here?"

"To me, very strange."

"Strange that I should long to see my child?"
Her face with all its glow and intensity had a

curious expression of pain, of perplexity, of timidity, of dependence.

"Very strange," he repeated.

"What if I should confess I had some desire also to see you?" she went on.

"That is too incredible."

"Incredible," she repeated with a little laugh, yet still with a manner which suggested that his words stung her, "because you have no interest in me, no curiosity concerning me."

"I have no right to feel any interest concerning you. You went your way, and God forbid that ever with my most idle fancy I should attempt to follow you. My only curiosity is to find out your reason for intruding on me to-night, in order that any further invasion shall be out of the question."

She retreated a step as he spoke, put up her hand as if to ward off a blow.

"Can't you see?" he went on, "that you are my worst enemy? After the ruin you have brought upon our lives, Larry's and mine, you ought to be satisfied. The sharper the scourge to me the keener your exultation, no doubt; but this humiliation shall not be repeated. First, let me understand what you want of me, and I shall then know how to protect myself."

She was not looking at him, but about the room, and spoke now as if addressing some invisible spectator.

"He tells me of the ruin I have brought upon

his life, yet here he lives with my only child, and with all that money can give!"

- "Hitherto, you have had a certain sum from me each month," Garthe proceeded, his voice never rising above the low, impassive note he had first struck. "It ought to provide you with the comforts of life, but if you have involved yourself in debt I will help you. It has been my habit to limit my own wants in order to insure comfort for the boy."
- "Oh, you are so kind, so hideously kind, so cold, so remote!" she said. "I should suppose you had no memory."
  - "I have too much memory."
  - "But, after all, I am Larry's mother."
- "No possible plea could put you so absolutely in the wrong. Of course, you are Larry's mother; that is the reason I have so far borne with you."
  - "You do not seem to feel any pity for me."
  - "Why should I pity you?"
- "For having thrown away my life; for having in my ignorance, my childishness, believed that somewhere outside of my life with you lay what I thought I longed for. Think how young I was, how crude. That callous, untaught creature had nothing to do with the woman I am now. I do not know her, I despise her, I disown her; yet I have to bear the sins she committed, have to be everlastingly the victim of her folly and wickedness. I have to go on and finish the life she spoiled for me."

Bella, as she spoke, had retreated from him step

by step, and now turned to the end of the mantelpiece, put her hands on it, and dropped her head upon them. Garthe stood stupefied and incredulous, looking at her. Her tones and gestures suggested tragic acting, yet her words brought up a crowd of suggestions.

"Do not expect pity from me, of all men," he said. "Turn to some of the others."

"Don't insult me," she said, with a sob, and her whole figure shook with emotion.

"I had no intention of insulting you. I wished to emphasize the fact that you were once my wife, that now you are not my wife, and that there is just that bar in the way of your counting on my pity and sympathy."

"You do not seem to realize that when a woman loves a man as I"—

"Don't tell me you love me, that you ever loved me," he said peremptorily. "You took me at a moment when it seemed as if I could offer you something to your liking, then when you were disappointed you flung me aside. Nothing held you, no habit, no instinct, no common loyalty, certainly no love. Forgive my seeming brutal, —I have no wish to be cruel. I only wish to show you that facts are inexorable things."

She raised her head, turned slowly, and looked at him.

"I did love you," she said excitedly. "You are the only man I ever loved."

She said it quite simply, but the glow and fire of her eyes and lips made the words appear as if she flung them out from a passion too strong to be suppressed or concealed. He could see her hands tremble, he could see the convulsive quivering of her lips. It was this suggestion of womanly weakness that set his heart beating.

"What a man does not understand," she went on, "is that a woman wants to be sure of his love, that she is tempted to put it to strange trials."

He had regained his equilibrium.

- "You put my love to such incredible trials that no wonder it did not survive the test," he said calmly.
  - "Then you never loved me!"
- "Possibly not; I was a boy a boy of strong imagination. Say I never loved you."
- "But you did love me," she cried impetuously. "Unless I had had that recollection to live on I should have died long ago. You loved me dearly, Lawrence, you cannot deny it."
  - "Have it as you will."
- "You loved me with all your heart, as a man can love but once in his life. A woman does not forget,"—she made a step towards him. "I am about ready to believe," she whispered, "that you love me still."
- "Have it any way that pleases you; I have no inclination to test my feelings, past or present, towards you. There is the stubborn, unalterable

fact that we are divorced. What use you made of your freedom I never inquired. If I could love a woman who vanished into darkness,—thick uncompromising darkness I can have no wish to penetrate,—I must be a fool, doomed to illusion."

- "I am a widow," she said, lifting her head.
- "A widow?" he repeated, as if incredulous.
- "I am the widow of Aurelio Hernandez, who died a year and a half ago."
- "Be it so," said Garthe with a shrug, as if still skeptical. "I recall Hartley's speaking of his having made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Hernandez, but I did not suspect that you were she."
- "You have heard, then, of the rich Mrs. Hernandez," she said with singular complacency.
- "Yes, I had heard of the rich Mrs. Hernandez."
- "Yet you thought I came to you as a beggar," she laughed. "Go ask my lawyer and my bankers if I need an extra hundred or so a month."
- "I congratulate you on having attained your ambition," he said quietly. It was clear that she was reinstated in her own esteem, now that she could appear under her true colors, and as if with an air of relief at being through with playing a part she sank languidly and gracefully into a chair before the fire.
- "You remember," she said, leaning back and glancing at him, "that I always wanted to be rich."

"Yes, I remember that you always wanted to be rich."

"Ah, you remember;" she clasped her hands at the back of her head, and looked up into his face. The attitude, the smile, the tone of familiarity, addressed his consciousness. She went on: "I always wanted to be rich,—I thought the having what one wanted the end of existence. Now, I see the facts of life more clearly. Do you remember a red frock you brought me from Frisco?"

He was fretted by this personal tone,—by this breaking down of barriers, by this intimacy. She saw that he flushed.

"Nothing ever pleased me so much as that frock," she said. "Now-a-days, I have big boxes of clothes from Paris, but I would give anything for—"

She had put up her hand and touched his arm.

He broke through the net in which he was half entangled.

"What can be the use of this?" he asked. "Looked at simply from the point of good taste such reminiscences are abhorrent."

"Oh, you are hard, hard, hard," she cried. "If somehow I could reach you, — speak to your heart."

He began to pace the room. She sprang up and blocked his path. "You want this ended," she said.

"Yes; since you are so rich, you cannot have come to me for more money."

- "No, I did not come for money."
- "Yet I suppose there is something."
- "Yes; I want you to give Larry to me."
- "I give Larry to you?"

His tone and look implied that what she asked was not only impossible, but inconceivable. Yet at the same moment it was clear from his change of color, from the flash of his eye, that she had for the first time touched him to the quick, — had indeed alarmed him. Not that in measuring himself against her he found her a dangerous adversary, but he had become conscious of her inexhaustible resources. What an ingenious diversity of tricks, what clever feints,— and what well-dealt blows!

"No," he added; "I shall not give Larry to you."

But she saw that she had roused something in him which had not hitherto leaped into life, and what had at the moment been a mere dexterous turning of the subject, became all at once a powerful lever in her hands.

"But I could do so much for him," she said.
"He shall have every advantage that my wealth can give him."

Garthe made a gesture.

- "I should rather have him brought up in the direct poverty."
- "But he loves me!" she pleaded with an appealing face and accent.
- "He knows no evil yet. He is ready to love all the world."

- "Keep him from all knowledge of evil," she said more and more timidly and eloquently. "He did love me; you saw that his heart went out to me. He has need of me."
- "He has had need of a mother, but you failed him."
- "I will make up to him. I will atone. It is all I ask for, all I want to do. Why might it not be possible —"

He looked at her steadily.

- "Why might not what be possible?"
- "For me to live here."

They faced each other in silence, — that question between them.

# CHAPTER XVI.

#### A TEST.

- "I CAN hardly suppose that you are in earnest," Garthe said, after a pause. "Nothing could be more absolutely impossible."
- "But look at it from a practical point of view."
- "I will not look at it from any point of view," he cried.
- "But I am his mother," she went on speaking, always softly, as if treading in a sacred place; "no other woman can be his mother. You are no longer a boy; you can look at things from a man of the world's standpoint. I could do so much for you both! We could be legally re-united; nobody"—

He shuddered, his face darkened.

- "Drop the subject," he said imperiously.
- "Of course it startles you at first," she went on softly and persuasively, "but it is the best thing that can happen to all three of us. The whole arrangement should be on the terms which pleased you. I would make no demands, insist on nothing. I would accept anything, bear with anything for the sake of having Larry; he should be the link between us."

If for a moment a fit of savage feeling had taken possession of him, as her tone softened in questioning, as she gazed at him with a look of absolute humility, he experienced a reaction. Had he done her injustice? Was she actually in earnest? "Of course," she proceeded, "everything would

be for his sake. I should not for a moment believe that you did it for mine; I should know that you did not love me, that you could never love me, but I should try possibly to teach you to believe in me, — to show you that I am not wholly the poor creature you take me for. I ask for nothing except to be here in the same house with you, seeing you or not seeing you. I should leave everything to your generosity. I feel as if I could be contented if I had the chance to know something of you, - to do something for you. It might make me feel that after all my life had some meaning, some centre; and perhaps — I might build up in your sight a character which could - " She broke off. "But no matter," she went on in a different voice. "It is no question of doing anything for me. But even you must feel it is the best thing that could happen to Larry."

"I do not admit that," he said instantly.

"I don't wonder you are prejudiced against me, I do not wonder you are hard, — that — " She came towards him. Her face was pale, her eyes were brimming with tears. "I suppose what you care for is habit, prosperity, the world's opinion,—

but even in that way it would be better for you both. My money would "—

"Don't allude to your money," he said. "I do not want your money, either for myself or for Larry."

"I know you do not want it, and I only mentioned it because — don't you see my real motive, Lawrence? Lawrence! Lawrence! look at me. All I think of is that—" She had put her hand on his arm; she leaned heavily forward; her cheek touched his shoulder.

At this moment came a knock at the door.

Garthe had stood as if stupefied, conscious of the thrill of feeling which passed through him, but of little else. At this sound, he put the form which leaned upon him more and more heavily, aside. He drew a long breath, as if released from a nightmare. "Sit down," he said to Bella.

"Come in," he called, and Amelia opened the door, with a troubled face.

"The carriage has gone, sir," she said.

"The carriage gone?" stammered Garthe.

"The man rang the bell at ten o'clock, to say he could not stay any longer on such a night," Amelia went on. "I told him to wait, and you would pay him well. Then at half past ten he rang again, and said for no money would he let the horses be out until after eleven. I begged him to wait until eleven. But now it is eleven and he has gone."

<sup>&</sup>quot; Gone?"

- "Gone, sir."
- "You should have told me what the man said."
- "I knocked, sir; I have knocked three times, but you took no notice. I did not like to seem to disturb you, sir, when you had a strange visitor."
- "There must be another carriage at once. Is Button here?"
  - "No sir, this is his night for duty at the Denby."
  - "I will go myself."
- "I don't think, sir, you could get a carriage for love or money, at this time of night, and such a dreadful night. The drifts are higher than a man's head."

"I will see."

Garthe had, so far, spoken and acted mechanically, and it was not until he crossed the room, walked along the hall, opened first the door, then the outer door of the vestibule, and encountered the icy blast and a swirl of snow, that his brain cleared. The street was lighted with gas, and at the corner was an electric lamp; he seemed to be looking into a white mist, - so dense was the mass of the driven snow. As he opened the door, a little avalanche had swept into the vestibule. He stood for a moment, gazing straight before him. He saw, as by a blinding flash, the whole difficulty of the situation. The conviction which gained ground in some recess of his brain was, "She planned it. She intended that just this should happen."

He turned round before he saw that Bella had put on her wraps, and was now standing just behind him.

- "Of course you cannot go," he said. "The idea is absurd."
  - "But I must go."
- "I do not think it would be possible to procure a carriage. Of course it is impossible that you should go."

"I can walk; I am strong, I" -

Garthe had clanged to the outside door, and now, putting a hand on each of her shoulders, he pressed her forward into the hall, and closed the inner door.

"It is utterly out of the question. You will stay here all night. Amelia, take this lady to the room above; make her comfortable, and if she wishes it, stay with her." He glanced towards Bella. "The whole second floor is at your disposal," he said. "I will bid you good-night."

He went into the library, and closed the door behind him.

Again, from some corner of his brain came that insistent thought: "She planned it. She intended that just this should happen."

He locked first one door and then another, as if feeling himself beleaguered by foes. Then he stood still in the centre of the floor, and looked round the room, as if trying to understand where he was, what he was, and what this thing was

which had happened to him. The most wretched thoughts swarmed in his mind, reminiscences of the remote past, impressions of the present. Twice he struck his forehead with his clenched fist, as if to rouse himself from dreams to actualities, for it seemed impossible to think coherently. His mental operations consisted of mechanical repetitions of the same sentences: "She planned it; she intended that just this should happen;" then in another tone, "It shall not be, it shall not be, it shall not be;" then again, "Temptress, shameless!" All the recollections, forecasts, and imaginings he could summon seemed to be comprised in this set of formulas, which he went through, again and again, as if his brain revolved in the same circle of images, impressions, - as if introspection meant nothing to him but this sequence of ideas. He recalled the moment of his entering the house that evening; the feeling of shame and horror with which the image of that woman took shape out of the firelight and shadows in this room; his feeling that he was at another crisis of his fate, - a man pushed by destiny. Had he been weak? Had he permitted himself to be mastered by his imagination? Had he lacked decision and judgment, selfcontrol? Had his concession, his magnanimity, been an apology for cowardice? At this moment, humiliated, perplexed, with all his lights astray, he was ready to accuse himself of any weakness. Once before she had dragged him through the dust, but it seemed to him now, looking back, that through that ordeal he had walked proudly and easily. Then he had felt that magnanimity, that generosity was irreconcilable with his self-respect; then he had not told himself that a false wife was a mere accidental obstacle in a man's path, which a little legal tinkering could do away with. No, then he would have no part or lot with the evil thing. This feeling of humiliation, of having been thrown out of his path, of not being wholly master of himself, pressed upon him.

"Temptress! Shameless one!" he ejaculated, with a gesture as if shaking off a hateful thing.

But although he uttered these words aloud, although he kept his mind fixed on the clear facts of his own history, and this inevitable sequence, he was conscious that he did this in order to push away a rush of ideas still more intolerable. So far he had not dared to think of his own lost happiness, of the crushing shame he felt at the thought that the girl he loved must hear of what had befallen him.

Then suddenly he fell on his knees.

"Constance! Constance!" he said, under his breath. He bent his head forward on some chance support, and remained there fixed and motionless. The heart in the man cried out at last with a sense of pain, of disappointment, which could no longer be deadened, and along with it, rage against himself, remorse even. He had not

been truthful and candid; he had not been faithful to the rules which had for years been the guide of his life; and for these omissions there is a price which the gods exact. He did not for a moment palter with the plain fact that he had lost Constance; any other idea was wholly irrational. He rose to his feet and stood for a moment, revolving the situation in his mind. She must hear of this woman now; the fact would be notorious, -her entrance into his house, her staying under the same roof with him. The news was sure to be told, and such a bit of gossip is at once a devouring dragon. No man can cope with it. It was horrible to picture the facts as they must be imparted to her. was inconceivable that she should ever again regard him with kind feelings. He saw all the consequences at a glance. She was a sweet woman, a pure woman, a saint; but such was the situation, there was no possible justification for him. And indeed, where else should chastisement fall, except on him?

Yet he suffered as he thought of her belief in him, so frankly, so generously avowed, going to death. He stretched out his arms, as if he felt a longing to escape from fetters. A wife playing the part of returned prodigal! A wife he seemed not to have rejected! Could it be that this thing had happened to him? That, entangled, as by the cunning of the devil, he was henceforth to be bound? That this odious and impossible relation was to be

no easual thing, but the wretched law of his life? He felt his head swim round. He became conscious of intense weariness. "Let me sleep a little and wake up sane. I have no longer any judgment," he muttered, under his breath, and threw himself at full length on the sofa, crossing his arms above his head. He closed his eyes, but the moment he was in an attitude of rest, he was wide awake. life is ruined," he said to himself. nothing to live for, -everything is at an end." But the thought of Larry smote him. "I must go on for Larry's sake. I will take him and go to Europe." Yet on the moment, it occurred to him that the arguments Bella had brought forward had some force. If Larry were never to hear that his mother had been a disgrace to him, if he could grow up, feeling that there was no shameful secret to conceal, that his mother was in the same house, that she was good to him, that he had a duty to her, - it might be better for the boy. No fiction of himself being free could be sustained with this accursed fate hanging over him. Should he say to her: "Stay here if you like and on any terms you like, only do not expect ever that I shall do otherwise than suffer you for Larry's sake?"

So ran his thoughts in shame, in disdain, in rage, feeling as if, in this world, where there is the same punishment for our ignorant mistakes as for our sins, to dogmatize on any subject is a waste of breath; it becomes at last the only wisdom simply

to acquiesce in what seems likely to spare any one pain. What he hated most might be so intervolved with benefits for another that his own misery could be no reason for rejecting anything that fate could impose. His ideas wandered; he felt himself sinking into slumber. Suddenly, just as he was becoming unconscious, he was startled by a sound. It seemed far off, but, nevertheless, it made him spring up with a sensation like that of a sentinel who is in danger of being accused of deserting his post.

"What is it?" he asked. "Who is there?"

"Let me in," said a soft voice with an appealing accent.

He stood gazing at the door a moment without moving or speaking. He could see that the knob was turned from without,—he could hear the sound of something pressing against it.

His feeling was that this was what he had expected. He experienced no astonishment, but he felt that it was the evil spirit of his life that approached him and that he had to contend with, — a hateful thing, at once a part of himself and no part of himself; seductive to sense, yet hostile; something to conquer, to fling off; something not to be tampered with.

He opened the door.

Bella stood there. He moved aside and she entered the room. There was a look about her of womanish, almost childish, weakness and appealingness. "The wind howls so," she said timidly, as if ill-assured of her welcome, "I could not sleep."

She had removed her dress and had wrapped herself in some kind of rich Oriental rug or blanket, which Garthe recognized as belonging to a couch in his room.

She looked up at him. "I heard you moving about," she observed. "I felt that you too were restless, — perhaps unhappy."

"I was, on the contrary, fast asleep when you tried the door," said Garthe. "I should advise you to go back to your room."

"You were asleep!" she said reproachfully.

"And I — I could not sleep. The room seemed to be haunted."

"Very likely."

"I asked myself, did you and I belong to the living, breathing world, yet were so estranged?"

He gave her a strange look.

"I cannot believe in this attitude of cold distance," she said softly.

She came nearer.

"I can't bear this intolerable sense of isolation," she said. "I know it comes from my own wickedness and folly, but I can't bear it. I want somehow to be forgiven. I must be forgiven,—I will be forgiven. Something in me cries out for your forgiveness,—a yearning which puts me beside myself."

But the mind she was addressing had regained

its equilibrium. At the present moment he saw before and after.

- "I advise you to go back instantly to your room," he said. "Am I so weak a thing as you take me to be?"
- "Are you measuring your strength against mine, a weak woman?"
- "I am measuring my patience, which has its limits."
- "Do not say so." She came towards him, fixing her beautiful, dreamy eyes on his. She counted with assurance on his yielding, but he met her glance with a sort of fury.
- "You can stay here," he said. "I have sometimes said to myself that the earth itself is not wide enough for you and me. Certainly this house is too narrow."

He walked straight out of the room and, not even taking hat or coat, straight out of the house. She heard the outer door clang after him. She followed into the empty hall, opened the door, and gazed out incredulously. It no longer snowed, and she could see his footprints on the drift over the threshold.

She shivered, closed the door, turned back, and sat down before the fire. "He hates me, that is clear," she said to herself; "but I have spoiled his peace of mind for a day or two, that is also evident."

She leaned forward and held out her hands to the coals.

"He will take a bad cold," she murmured, and laughed softly. Yet she did not feel altogether The most contradictory feelings triumphant. crowded upon her. Now that the experiment had in some measure failed, she was ready to reproach herself for having been abrupt, alarming, warning the touch before she won the sense. But he was beyond her; he had always been beyond her. She reflected with bitterness that he was faithful to that other woman, and a vague idea came into her mind which set her pondering things anew. She still sat over the fire, thinking it not wholly impossible that Garthe would return. Presently she found that she had dozed. It was half past one o'clock. The events of the evening suddenly shone before her in a clearer light, and she laughed, partly at herself and partly with a triumphant consciousness that Garthe had been beaten on his own ground. She reviewed certain scenes between them with some complacency; then when the clock struck two she said to herself: -

"I may as well go to bed. Evidently he was quite in earnest. He will not come back until morning."

And she went slowly upstairs.

## CHAPTER XVII.

MR. MARCHMONT FINDS HIS WAY MADE CLEAR.

"KATHLEEN, when I was a youngster I had my way to make; I had my art to put all my cravings into; I had my mother and sister to support, and was content with the declaration that the hour of my marriage had not struck, - that I was in no haste. But when Bernard Garner brought you home I saw why it was that I had not, hitherto, thought of a wife. Something in the trick you had of blushing, something in the way your eyelids fell, in the way you used your little hands, made me say to myself, 'That is the woman with whom, were she not my friend Bernard's wife, I might have fallen in love.' However, you were Bernard's wife, and I rejoiced in his happiness, and in seeing you grow, expand, develop into a woman. But since he died I have wondered if the feeling I have had for you so long were simply the test of my friendship and of my loyalty. wondered if loving you with downright knowledge that no other woman has ever touched my heart, that no other woman ever could touch my heart, gave me the right now - four years and more after your husband's death - to ask you to be my wife."

This was the speech which, in his sleepless night after that unlucky Sunday evening, John Marchmont had learned by heart. He had seen how, in spite of his clear purpose, he had permitted all sorts of trivial obstacles to intervene between him and Kathy, while Garthe, although equally hampered, had, with the easy efficacy of youth, snatched his longed-for moment with Constance. But then Constance had apprehended, while Kathy, blind, deaf, tied to foolish decorums, had not apprehended. Doubtless, John Marchmont confessed within himself, it was his own fault; he was old, wavering, infirm of purpose. It was, at least, something to get this formula by heart. It gave him a feeling of being ready for the next occasion. Yet he went to the house the next afternoon and sat dull, inert, speechless, while Kathy entertained a circle of visitors. Tuesday morning, however, he decided that he would speak out that day or else forever hold his peace. He dropped in at the Garners' soon after breakfast and found Constance and Kathleen in the morning-room upstairs. former was going out, but Kathleen was sitting in a low wicker chair with blue cushions, before a table, arranging bunches of violets in a bowl.

"Sit down and spend the morning with me," she said on the instant. "Constance has an engagement. I was wishing you would come."

Nothing could have seemed more facile, readymade, than this opportunity. But then a true lover recoils before the facile, the ready-made, as a *chef* before a prepared sauce, and courts difficulty, a test of his zeal and high courage. Perhaps for this reason Mr. Marchmont's spirits instantly deserted him, and he sat down speechless.

"I am afraid you are not well," Kathleen said presently, perceiving the weight of some insistent thought between them. "You are restless; you seem to have something on your mind."

"Something on my mind?" repeated John Marchmont blankly. The fragrance of the violets seemed to go to his head, or perhaps it was the sight of Kathleen in her plain black stuff gown with a white muslin fichu over her shoulders, into the knot of which, where the ends crossed in front, she had put two or three of the flowers.

"Something on my mind?" he said again.
"I'm always thinking of one thing now-a-days.
If I could drop it and take up some new idea I might have a chance of some peace and comfort, but not with this thing on my conscience."

"Dear me! You have n't committed a crime, I hope?"

- "No, I have not committed a crime."
- "I'm sure you are not in debt."
- "Mrs. Challoner seems to consider that I am."
- "Mrs. Challoner says you are in debt?"
- "Yes; that is, she says I do not fulfill my duty."
- "Your duty? What sort of duty?"
- "What she calls a man's first duty."

- "To love God and keep his commandments?"
- "Perhaps, then, it is the second duty of man I fail in."
- "I do not seem to remember what a man's second duty is," said Kathy, puzzled.
- "She declares that I ought to marry," murmured John Marchmont, his face crimson.
- "Marry? You marry?" repeated Kathy, in consternation.
- "Yes, I marry. Does the idea strike you as ridiculous?"
- "Does she say that you ought to marry anybody in particular?"
- "And pray, my dear Mrs. Garner, how could I marry anybody in general? She wants me to marry somebody very particular, so particular that I am afraid."
  - "Afraid? afraid she won't have you?"
- "Exactly. Afraid she will consider me a presumptuous old fool."
- "She ought to jump at you. I am certain she will jump at you. I suppose you mean Miss Shepard," murmured Kathy dolorously.
  - "Miss Shepard? What Miss Shepard?"
  - "Miss Shepard, the emancipator of women."
- "You don't suppose I wish to marry an emancipator of women?"
- "You spoke of its being somebody so superior, and I recollect that you told me Miss Shepard seemed to you deadly superior."

- "I perceive that you consider Miss Shepard of suitable age and attractions for an old fellow like me."
- "Is it anybody younger, then?" demanded Kathleen, with new energy, a spot of vivid color by this time burning on each cheek.
- "Younger, I should hope; more attractive, I should insist."
  - "How young?"
- "Very young," with a sigh; "far too young for a grizzled old ogre."
- "I don't feel sure what you mean by young," said Kathleen, evidently disturbed in mind. "Am I young, for instance?"
  - " Passably young."
  - "Is she younger than I am?"
  - "Let me see, Kathleen, how old are you?"
  - "Twenty-eight and six months."
  - "She is certainly no older than you are."
  - "Is she pretty?"
  - "The prettiest woman I know."
- "I see, it is Blanche Challoner," said Kathy, growing pale, her lips quivering slightly. "Well, I wish you joy."
  - "Wish me joy?"
- "But I do feel that you ought to have told me before," she said piteously.
  - "Told you what?"
  - "That you were going to be married."
  - "I have not said I was going to be married. I

only remarked that Mrs. Challoner insisted upon it."

- "Then you, yourself, in your own heart, don't really care about it," cried Kathleen, more hopefully.
- "Indeed, I want it with all my heart and soul," said John Marchmont. "I am like the baby after Pears' soap; I shan't be happy until I get it. Don't you approve of it?"
  - "It's so strange, —it's so upsetting —"
- "That I should try to be happy like other people?"
- "But then we were n't put into the world simply to be happy," said Kathleen, with solemnity. "There's something better than happiness."
  - "I'll be hanged if I know what it is."
- "And then," pursued Kathy ardently, "people are not necessarily happy because they are married. I think the feeling that marriage is a failure is becoming more and more general."
  - "I'm willing to take the risks if she will."
- "Don't say so! I cannot bear to hear you say so. Don't tell her so," cried Kathy.
  - "Tell whom?"
- "Blanche. She is not the wife for you. She is beautiful, she dresses well, but I don't want you to marry her. There!"
- "I tell you what, Kathleen, the fellow who wins Blanche Challoner ought to be a very proud and happy man."

"Perhaps he ought," she murmured. There, were clear signs of a conflict of feeling going on within her. She was alternately flushed and pale,—her lips set constantly in a grieved curve; something like a sob came now and then. "I admit," she said reluctantly, "Blanche is splendid for dinner parties,—she sets off the table, and she does look magnificent on a coach."

"Well, what else should I want of a wife," demanded John Marchmont, "except to gild my declining years with dinner and coaching parties?"

"I should not have supposed you cared for such foolish, worldly things at all."

"What do I care about, then, Kathleen?"

Their eyes met, and a direct answer to his question seemed to leap from hers, but she swerved away with a slight air of embarrassment. He had started up as they talked, and had been walking about the room, but now sat down beside her, and she leaned forward and put a finger on his sleeve.

"I've thought of you there at Bowhill all alone," she said coaxingly. "I often say to myself or to Constance on rainy days or at twilight that Mr. Marchmont must be lonely."

"Set your mind at rest about that. I am lonely."

She went on. "And I have wished I were there to amuse you. For I don't care whom you may be in love with, or whom you may marry, I can amuse you better than anybody else. There!"

Having launched this thunderbolt, she paused and waited to see the effect of her words. "I know just how to amuse you," she then proceeded with clear defiance. "I could amuse you a thousand times better than Blanche. I know I have n't been asked to amuse you, but I could."

Nothing could well have surprised John Marchmont more than the rôle imposed upon him. Kathleen went on with the air of a coaxing child.

"I always thought you liked me better than Blanche Challoner," she murmured with clear grievance.

"I do like you," said John Marchmont.

"Say you like me better than Blanche Challoner," she murmured imploringly.

"I like you better than forty thousand Blanche Challoners."

"Oh, oh, oh, yet you want to marry her! It's immoral."

"No use trying to get you to marry me," said John Marchmont. "You don't care a button about me."

"I do, - I do eare."

"Not a bit. You may like to flatter me, and make a fool of me, but if I were to give you my heart in a bonbon box, tied up with ribbon, you would eat it, probably making a grimace over the musty flavor. That would be the end of it."

"It would n't, - it could n't."

"You would n't give me your heart back."

- "Yes, I would."
- "How many times have you told me you had lost that heart of yours? That you had given it away to women, children, actors, actresses, singers, orchestra leaders, horses, dogs, cats. Just remember Mrs. Challoner's brother."
- "It was nothing, just a phrase, just something to take up with for the moment, just something to hide the fact from myself that I was lonely, had nothing, had lost everything."
- "How about Ferdinand Hartley? Examine your conscience."
  - "It was just a fad like china-painting."
  - "Am I different?"
  - "Oh, so different."
- "You put strange ideas into my head. Now if you could be serious one minute, Kathleen"—
  - "I am serious. I am dreadfully serious."
  - "Do you mean that actually you are lonely?"
  - " Ye-es."
- "That that you would be willing to come out to Bowhill and live with me?" said John Marchmont, conscious of a quickening of his blood, a momentary blurring of his vision, as he leaned forward and put a hand on each of her shoulders.
  - "Do you want me to come?"
  - "A little."
  - "What will you give me if I come?"
  - "I will give you a pair of" -
  - "Oh, I wanted you to give me" -

"Well, what?"

"Your heart."

Five minutes later John Marchmont was filled with the exhibitantion of a schoolboy, and Kathy looked frightened and, it must be confessed, half unhappy.

"You won't tell Constance," she said pleadingly.

"Not tell Constance we are going to be married?"

- "Oh, I don't mind that. People will have to know that, and I shall be rather proud. Don't tell her that—"
  - "That what?"
  - "That I almost asked you" —
- "That you quite asked me, that you insisted upon it and had to reconcile me to the idea. No, perhaps we may as well keep that to ourselves, and in time I may forgive you."
- "But, John, you are sure you would rather marry me than Blanche Challoner?"
  - "Oh, yes. Sure."

# CHAPTER XVIII.

## FERDINAND HARTLEY'S AMBITION.

Mrs. Hernandez reëntered her rooms at the Percy towards noon on the day following her interview with Lawrence Garthe. Miss Shepard had gone, the day before, to Philadelphia, on some mission, and had not yet returned. The place looked cold and lifeless. Bella had a strange sense of the emptiness and dreariness of things in general. There seemed no longer to be anything to look forward to. She felt as if brought up suddenly against a blank wall. She had awakened at ten o'clock, startled to find herself in a strange room, and feeling a reaction from her reckless exhilaration of the preceding day. She had rung the bell, had inquired if Mr. Garthe were in the house, and had been told by Amelia that he had come back about seven o'clock, had roused Larry, had had him dressed and his clothes packed, and had taken him away in a carriage.

With her spirits already in a state of unstable equilibrium, this news had depressed Bella. It seemed a dull world, an irremediably spoiled world for her. Since she had found out that Lawrence Garthe was within reach she had floated upon

a rising flood of conjecture, curiosity, almost, it might be said, hope, towards some possible event which loomed full at once of promise and of threat. Now, no longer upborne by any clear resolution, she found herself stranded at dead low tide, the shallows laying bare everything she had believed in yesterday. She was at first in such absolute disgust with herself she hated the thought of what she had done, compelled to identify her action as a failure and a mistake. However, as she dressed, ate her breakfast, and talked with Button and Amelia, eliciting little in return save an added sense of rebuff, she shook off the helpless sense of being baffled and thwarted. In her capriciously poised mood she could not have told whether she was in earnest when, after calling for a carriage, she took leave, with the message for Garthe that she would soon return; whether she realized that her play was made, whether she surrendered the game, or looked forward to another east of the die.

She sat down over the fire in her room at the Percy with her hands hanging loosely in her lap, her eyes dull, and her lips sullen. She experienced no sense of humiliation in the thought that she had intruded upon Garthe; she felt herself in no way culpable, yet was conscious of a soreness of conscience over her failure, and constantly went over the scene in her own mind from a personal point of view, criticising her own actions. She recalled the exultation, the half terror she had ex-

perienced in seeing first his figure, in silhouette, against the hall light, then, in the fuller illumination, his face with its clear, proud look, the indomitable glance which seemed to smite as it fell upon her.

His tone had been cold and stern, yet there had been something in his startled, half curious survey of her face, her toilette, which put her at her ease; which showed her that he yielded some tribute to her beauty, her elegance; that he realized she had risen, not fallen, in the scale; also that, although he had forgiven nothing, perhaps could never forgive, he still did not hate her; that it was not in his nature to hate her. Once indeed he had loved her, - loved her as nobody else had ever loved her: as she said this to herself she burst into a fit of rage against herself, or him, or the world, turned and struck the cushions of the chair where she sat, started up, paced the room with her hands pressing her temples, threw herself on the bed, buried her face in the pillows, and bit them again and again as if in a blind fury.

Yet presently the paroxysm passed, and she sat up, her face flushed, her hair thrown carelessly back.

"But I am glad he was cold as ice," she said with a shiver. Had she been in earnest in trying to rekindle a spark of the old passion, in testing the efficacy of that air of cool reserve which she believed to be a mere pretense? "I do not understand myself," she murmured.
"Put me in a new place and I am a mystery; I am afraid of myself in the dark." Again she said audibly: "I am glad that he was cold as iee."

It is hard to tell when one is in earnest and when one is not in earnest; but to see him, to see Larry, to see the house, to perceive clearly that in spite of what she had cost him he had found dignity, peace, happiness; to recognize in the least of his surroundings his old dominant traits, - neatness, order, method, his requirement of everything and everybody about him that they should subordinate themselves to a rational standard and to a cohesive law, to his ideas, which, were to him the right ideas, - had brought, along with the old implike feeling of rebellion and antagonism, the old attraction; and the sentimental, passionate current in her veins had ruined everything. Instead of being wholly mistress of the occasion, instead of maintaining an attitude impressionable, seducing, mobile, but yet firm, she had been precipitate, - had strained every nerve, made an intense effort somehow to reach him; if she could reach him, she had said to herself, she could move him. But he had escaped her; at the turning-point she had missed. But after all, here she was, rich, independent, unhampered.

"Would I go back?" she asked herself; "would I have had my life different? Suppose six years ago I had stayed with Lawrence instead of going

off as I did. Virtue is its own reward, they say. Would virtue have been a reward to me? We had different ideas, we had different ways, our natures were different. Still, suppose I had foreseen that he would eventually be rather a successful man, - suppose I had not taken the fancy that Algernon would supply all the variety and excitement I had missed, - suppose I had realized what a horrible experience he would give me, how I should learn to loathe him! Yes, suppose I had gone on being Mrs. Lawrence Garthe, and were living here now with him and with Larry, dressing for dinner, sitting with the boy and waiting for his father to come in, running towards him, opening my arms, receiving his kisses, his loving flatteries, being told the news, - should I be happy?"

Again she sprang up, and as if chafed by the solitude and the silence, struck everything that came in her way,—crashed a bottle on the dressing table,—tore open the curtains, pushed up the shades.

A knock came at the door, and a servant asked if she would have luncheon.

"Yes, and I will have a pint bottle of champagne," she added hastily.

Champagne invariably put her in good spirits, and presently she experienced an agreeable exhilaration which brought with it a different mood, of self-satisfaction, of belief in her ability to make her life just what she wished it to be. She enjoyed the stimulus of the champagne, the croquettes and pâtés, not only for themselves, but as a sign of the comfort her wealth could yield. It justified all the zigzags of her career that she could now, as a climax, to-day ring the bell and on the instant command all the resources of a great establishment. How absurd for her to feel compunctions, scruples, almost a romantic aspiration towards something different! What more could she ask than she possessed? And to repent anything she had done would be to give up these tangible advantages. A woman, if she wishes to remain young and beautiful, should never vex herself nor permit herself to be vexed. If somebody has to suffer, let it be somebody else. She had given Lawrence Garthe some galling moments; now let her try to strike him once more through that woman.

"I had almost forgotten about his being in love with her. I only thought whether he was still in love with me."

She revolved a dozen plans in her head. Should she write an anonymous letter, put a paragraph in the papers? She was in doubt about the precise form her vengeance should take until, rising from table, she glanced into the mirror and found herself in such admirable good looks she determined to deal her own blow and watch it strike home. She herself would go and see the rival who had supplanted her in Garthe's affections.

She freshened her toilette by a few effective touches, and stepped into her coupé at half past two o'clock with the feeling of going, seeing, and conquering. The day was mild. The snow, fallen in the night, was still dripping from the roofs; the streets, only half cleared, were deep in mud and slush, but overhead was a sky of spring, exquisitely blue with dots of fleecy clouds and a sun which warmed and inspired. Everywhere were exposed pots of plants in full blossom, and at each corner came a whiff from the bunches of violets offered by the flower-venders. In spite of the almost impassable streets, Broadway and Fifth Avenue were filled with carriages, and a constant stream of women poured in and out of the principal shops.

"Not one of them has half as much money to spend as I have," Bella thought within herself, at the same time that she was uneasily conscious that the tall houses, the great bazaars, the moving throngs of people, the general air of gayety and good-humor, represented a life to which she did not belong, from which a gulf seemed to separate her. She was the only woman, it seemed, whose friends were not looking for her; the only one who was not met with deference, with eager attentions, who did not wear a complacent air of being approved, flattered, caressed by hosts of admiring acquaintances.

"Drive on faster, — take a side street," she said to the man on the box. Her voice rang out

sharply, her complexion had heightened in color, she experienced the vague rage which at times possessed her against a world which seemed to bar her out in spite of her golden key which ought to unlock everything.

Five minutes later she left her carriage and was ascending the steps of the house on Lexington Avenue, when the door opened, disclosing John Marchmont taking leave of Mrs. Garner. It could be of no use for the latter to retreat, to pretend not to see the advancing visitor, for in another instant Bella, pressing her advantage, was over the threshold.

"I am so glad to find you at home, Mrs. Garner," she said in her abrupt, imperious way. "I wish particularly to see you."

"Oh," said Kathleen, helpless in the emergency, and feeling herself caught in a trap, "I was just — I really must —"

"Do you remember me?" demanded Bella, who easily enough discerned in the other's manner shrinking timidity, mixed with some curiosity.

"Oh, yes. It is Miss Shepard's friend. It is Mrs. Hernandez," said Kathleen, beginning to re-gather her forces. "Pray come in."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes," said Kathleen, looking regretfully after John Marchmont, who was lifting his hat in a last adieu from the pavement. He was to be back again in an hour, but already she experienced a

fresh need of him, of the perfect confidence and mutual understanding which gave her such a happy freedom. Then besides, she realized that she was flushed, disheveled, and she longed to run away; she wished she had not come to the door in that foolish, childish fashion, or that, having committed herself, she had insisted that John should turn back. She desired ardently that Constance should come, yet in spite of all those contradictions of feeling, with an air of prodigious politeness, she ushered her visitor into the drawing-room, maintaining a charm of manner, a felicity of phrase, which left Bella tongue-tied, ill at ease, oppressed by a consciousness of her rival's prettiness and elegance, and devoured by envy. But it was this graceful peace of mind she had come to spoil.

"How is Miss Shepard?" said Kathleen, as they sat down face to face. "How clever she is! How much she made us feel the other day! I was so much impressed!"

"Oh yes," returned Bella. "She is very impressive at times."

"What a privilege-to live near such a woman," pursued Kathleen, harping on the only subject which presented itself to her mind, since the other had suggested no reason for the visit. "You and she are great friends, I suppose."

"She is my companion," said Bella loftily. "I pay her a high salary to live with me."

"Ye-es? I should suppose she would need to

have a small fortune paid her for such a service," observed Kathleen with an air of enthusiasm; then, becoming conscious of the possibly dubious meaning of her words, she blushed scarlet and added with an air of deprecation, "You must be very grateful to her."

"She sometimes seems very grateful to me," returned Bella with a shrill little laugh. "I must have some one. I am lonely."

"Oh yes, one does get lonely," said Kathleen.
"I have a daughter."

"A daughter? Do you mean your stepdaughter? I should suppose she was as old as you."

"Not quite." Kathleen began by this time to make up her mind that she had carried out her own rôle to its limit. She had admitted her visitor, seated her, exhausted the only topic they had in common, and now, putting on her finest air, she sat back in her chair and awaited events.

There ensued a pause.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Garner," Bella remarked presently, "that you consider it very odd for me to introduce myself like this when you have never been to see me."

"Odd? Oh dear, no, not in the least," replied Kathleen suavely.

"I felt, you see, Mrs. Garner, that I had a right to come."

"Oh, of course," Kathleen murmured with an air of mild surprise.

"I might say I felt it was my duty to come."

"Your duty? I am sure it is extremely good of you to say so."

"I hear," Bella continued with a tone and look which suggested a challenge to personal encounter, "that you are thinking of marrying again."

"Who told you?" ejaculated Kathleen, stupe-fied. She had been engaged to Mr. Marchmont not quite three hours; he had not left her until he encountered this woman on the steps; not even to Constance had the news been confided.

"I heard," said Mrs. Hernandez. "It may be that I am better acquainted with the man you are in love with than you are."

"Oh, oh, oh," said Kathleen, wide-eyed with surprise. "That does not seem possible."

"It is possible. It is true. I wish you to answer me one question, Mrs. Garner. I have a right to ask it. Has he ever told you about his first marriage?"

"His first marriage?" Kathleen repeated, incredulous. It seemed to her that the world was turning round.

"Surely you must know that he has been married! He has a little boy seven years old."

"Oh, oh, oh," said Kathleen again, her brain reeling before these far-reaching suggestions. The woman's manner carried instant conviction, yet it did seem to her so very improbable that John Marchmont could have concealed such a passage in his career. "A little boy seven years old!" she faltered, helpless. "I should have said I knew the least fact in his history."

"Lawrence Garthe was married at Whitehouse, Colorado, nine years ago last August," said Mrs. Hernandez, as if flinging down the gauntlet. you pretend to tell me that you had no idea of it?"

Kathleen's brain had cleared in a flash. Her spirits, too, rebounded. She was ready to meet the crisis.

"I did not know the exact date," she said, with an air of interest. "Pray tell me anything you have to say about it. We have plenty of time. You said you came to tell me something. Don't let us be incoherent. It is so much better to say everything clearly, and then one understands. Yes, I knew that Mr. Garthe had been married, that he had a dear little boy."

"I wonder," eried Mrs. Hernandez impatiently, "what else he has told you."

"He has told me all sorts of interesting things. He is one of the most entertaining men I know."

"Ah, - entertaining! Has he talked to you about his wife? Has he confided the fact to you that his wife is still alive?"

"His wife alive?" repeated Kathleen in clear dismay. "Are n't you mistaken? How can she be alive?"

"Why not? A woman does not die simply because -- "

"But it is surely so uncomfortable," Kathleen murmured, her mind reverting to certain dangers now well passed, but which yet made this news confounding in the extreme.

"Of course they were divorced," explained Mrs.

Hernandez.

An exclamation escaped Kathleen. She wrung her hands.

"What did you say?" asked the visitor.

"It just flashed across my mind that I have talked about divorces to Mr. Garthe," said Kathleen piteously. "What must he have thought of me?"

Bella, all the time conscious of being foiled, of not actually reaching her victim, made a quick thrust.

"His wife obtained a divorce from him because he had run away from her."

"What a dreadful woman she must have been," said Kathleen.

"How dare you say such a thing?" cried Bella defiantly.

"But I know Mr. Garthe," said Kathleen, equally roused, "and I know that he never would have run away unless she had been a dreadful woman! From the first moment I saw him I felt as if he had had some painful experience, but I did not suspect that it had been a bad wife."

"How dare you insult me?" said Bella, flushing with rage.

"Was she your sister?" asked Kathleen; then with swift divination, "Was it yourself?"

"It was I."

The two women looked at each other.

- "I thought you were Mrs. Hernandez,—a widow," said Kathleen, puzzled.
  - "I am the widow of Aurelio Hernandez."
- "Then how can you tell me you were ever Mrs. Lawrence Garthe?"
- "I have already said I obtained a divorce from him."
- "Oh, I wish," murmured Kathleen with fresh remorse, "that I had never brought up that uncomfortable subject before him." The image of Garthe's grave, clearly-outlined face, his whole look and manner that of a man tried and seasoned, came up to her mind in contrast with this handsome, richly-dressed, successful woman.
- "I know Mr. Garthe very well," she said with enthusiasm. "I admire him very much."
  - "You don't know my side," retorted Bella.
- "No, I do not know your side," observed Kathleen gently. "Appearances are very much against you, still I have lived a long time, and know that appearances are often deceitful."
  - "I do not see that appearances are against me."
- "It would be so dreadful, to make one's husband run away from one."
- "The fault was his. He was a tyrannical husband, and I rebelled."

"Tyrannical?" said Kathleen. She remembered that Garthe had sometimes impressed her as a little masterful. "I rather like to be tyrannized over, myself," she added, "but it makes marriage a trifle hazardous."

"I assure you, Lawrence Garthe is tyrannical."

"I know how despotic men can be. I heard of a man once who would only allow his wife to send one pair of stockings a week to the laundry."

"That is nothing," said Bella impatiently.

"But it implies a great deal," insisted Kathleen, apparently putting all her heart into the subject. "A man who tyrannizes about stockings would not stop there. He might do anything. And I am not so tame as I seem. If a man were to deny me plenty of fresh stockings I am sure it would bring out all the naughtiness in me. I am sure I sympathize with you very much. Still I should wish to hear Mr. Garthe's side of the story."

"We had different ideas, we had" -

"And you were not contented," said Kathleen, who had heard some one come in, and, fancying that John Marchmont might have returned, began to be in urgent haste; and accordingly, bent on dismissing her visitor, was prepared to understand her before she spoke and to give her ideas clear expression before she uttered them. "You wanted your own way, good or bad, and you gained your own way, good or bad. It is very easy to see that Mr. Garthe did not get his."

"I am not a woman to be hampered by every-day laws," said Bella, conseious all the time of missing her point, of finding her definite idea blurred and marred. "I felt that I could not have my life spoiled."

"I congratulate you on having succeeded," said Kathleen.

"Succeeded in what?"

"In spoiling other people's lives and carrying out your own ideas."

"If I have not carried out my own ideas" -

"I know how it is," interrupted Kathy; "a woman feels she must do something, so she commits stupidities and perhaps regrets it; but I dare say that it seems worth while to have one's fling; only"—

"Only what?" said Bella, carried away in spite of herself, and almost forgetting what she had come to say.

"I do not quite understand—about—that—Mr. Hernandez," said Kathleen, as if tired of trying to seek a solution to the enigma.

"I married again," said Bella proudly. "I had a right."

"Then I suppose Mr. Garthe has a right to marry again," said Kathleen, as if at last arriving at some clear conclusion.

She sat still, looking at her visitor, who seemed to be gathering her forces as if to carry out some great resolution. The pupils of her eyes were contracted; a crimson spot burned on each cheek,—her lips had sharpened. She looked as if she could spring.

- "Perhaps," she said abruptly, "he has no wish to marry again unless unless I will go back to him."
  - "You go back?" repeated Kathleen blankly.
- "I have gone back," said Bella. "I went there yesterday. I stayed there last night."
  - "I don't believe it," said Kathleen recklessly.
- "I wanted to see my child, of course there is always that bond between us."
  - "I don't believe it," said Kathleen again.
- "Lawrence came home, we dined together and afterwards"—
  - "I don't believe it."
- "And the reason I have come to you to-day is to tell you that he is my husband, that his child is my child, that"—
  - "I don't believe it."
- "And to ask you to give up any sort of engagement you have entered into with him."
- "I shall not give up any engagement," cried Kathleen, at the end of her patience, and with an electrical glow and fire and daring about her whole face and manner. "A woman who was engaged to him would be wicked, I consider, if she gave him up to you. He ought to be saved from you. He ought to be run away with. I cannot conceive how you could have ventured to come here with

this story, Mrs. Hernandez. I see the outrage it implies. But I do not believe in you, I do not believe in a word you have uttered, and I wish you a very good afternoon."

Five minutes later Mrs. Hernandez found herself in her carriage on her way back to the Percy. She hardly comprehended how her exit from the house had been effected. She knew that Mrs. Garner had suddenly risen to her feet, looking very tall, very pretty, her blue eyes blazing, her lips curling; she had rung the bell for a servant, made a gesture towards the door, and custom, propriety, civilized routine, had done the rest. They were stronger than any savage instinct. Bella could not assert herself against them. She felt herself rebuffed; experienced a sense of inadequacy. Nothing in the experience had pleased her; of all the exploits of Bella Brown this had satisfied her least. Mrs. Garner, in spite of her careless dress and disordered hair, had represented to her an ideal of elegance and charm beyond her experience. She could forgive her nothing. She only hoped that she had planted an arrow which would rankle in her heart.

Returning to the Percy, she was received by Miss Shepard, who had come back, and, sitting before a desk, was looking at her notes for a lecture to be delivered at four o'clock. She greeted Bella with unusual cordiality, but her peace of mind was of short duration, for Bella on the instant poured out

the whole story of her experiences during the past twenty-four hours, flinching at nothing.

"This separates us forever," said Miss Shepard She tied up the loose sheets of her manuscript, and rose with an absent air.

"I cannot understand why you should be angry with me," said Bella.

"No, you do not understand," said Eugenia.

After trying in vain to melt this icy demeanor, Bella grew bored, and permitted Miss Shepard to depart without any concession. It was clear to her that her enterprise had struck Eugenia rather as a success than as a disheartening failure, and Bella's spirits began to rise again. Of course the rôle she had played hardly came up to Eugenia's requirements of her; the mission she had imposed upon herself had not been exactly a delicate one, but she had been obliged to act for herself; indeed, when in her career had she not been obliged to do and dare, leaving weak, timid souls to look and long and tremble on the brink! She repented nothing, yet the experience had sickened her of New York, had made her feel that she was antagonistic to New York. The idea that she had encountered nothing save mortification and failure here had presented itself before, but it had been unwelcome, and she had accepted it only conditionally, reserving to herself the right of testing all sorts of experience, - of touching and handling; now she had made the experiment, and she surrendered. She was tired of New York, —or was it that she was tired of herself, of her bad management, her continual false moves? The sense of isolation, of the emptiness, the uselessness, of her own efforts, grew; she experienced a sense of irksomeness, of trying to breathe in a void. All at once came a tap at the door, and a man brought a card on a salver.

Bella cast a glance at herself in the mirror, and in an instant all her regrets, vexations, and humiliations vanished. "Ask Mr. Hartley to come up," she said.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## RENUNCIATION.

LEFT alone, Kathleen Garner, after hearing the street door close upon her visitor, drew a long breath of relief, turned, and to her surprise saw that Constance was standing between the half open curtains which divided the alcove from the main drawing-room.

"Have you been there all the time?" gasped Kathy.

"No, not all the time," answered Constance, who was very pale.

"I remember now I heard some one come in. Did you know who that was?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hernandez."

"Is n't she a terror! Did you hear what she said?"

" Yes."

"She seems to me like — like a Mary Magdalen who has n't repented," said Kathleen. "Did you believe what she said?"

"Could one disbelieve it?"

"Oh, Constance," cried Kathy, seeing in the girl's whole look and feeling, in her tone and words, a conflict of feeling, "I know what you are

thinking of." She put her arms about her neck and clasped her close. "You are thinking, suppose I had married Mr. Garthe when you wanted me to do it, how embarrassing this would have been! You are cleverer than I am, Constance, but sometimes you are wrong."

"I am always wrong," murmured Constance.

"I never did like divorces," said Kathleen, "but the practical discomfort of them never struck me before. She had heard I was going to be married. It startled me so, it seemed like clairvoyance; for Constance, I am going to be married."

Constance did not seem at first to hear; her ardent young face had taken on a new, indefinable look of trouble.

"Not to Mr. Garthe," Kathy pursued, bringing a hand down firmly on each of the other's shoulders as a clear intimation that any anxiety about a possible complication in that direction was quite too absurd; "to somebody else altogether."

Constance, with visible effort, brought back her thoughts to answer the present demand upon her sympathies. She looked at the bright, triumphant face close to hers.

"Do you mean Mr. Marchmont?" she exclaimed. "Oh, Kathy, how glad I am!" She found her heart swelling, she could not help uttering a sort of sob.

"You are not crying, Constance," said Kathy, as they clasped each other anew, a deep, insistent,

but widely different thought giving a sort of passion to them both.

"Oh, not crying, Kathy, but I am so glad, it is such a relief. I wanted so to have you happy, dear. I was stupid, clumsy, went to work in the wrong way, but I did want with all my heart and soul to have you happy, and lately, I had begun to think—"

She stopped short, remembering how she had come to the belief that it was Kathleen's fate to marry John Marchmont.

"There was never but one way, — there was never but one person," cried Kathy. "I never cared for anybody else, I never thought of anybody else, — there never could have been anybody else. When I woke up in the morning I always said to myself I hoped Mr. Marchmont would come to-day. I did not quite understand why. But I was always jealous if he looked at anybody else, if he spoke to anybody else. I felt as if he belonged to me; I did, really. I could n't have let him marry anybody else, could I, Constance, — Blanche Challoner, for example?"

"I do not imagine he ever wished to marry Blanche Challoner," said Constance.

"No," murmured Kathy, almost ready to make a full confession, although it had been such a comfort that John Marchmont had promised that the story of how their engagement came about should remain their own consecrated secret. "He is in love with me; I do feel that he is in love with me. Of course, not as much as I—"She broke off. "I must dress at once," she exclaimed hurriedly. "He only went away for an hour. He will be back, and I must be ready for him."

The two went up the stairs together hand in hand, and Constance, following Kathleen into her own room, embraced her once more; then leaving her with the new happiness which surrounded her like a halo, the girl went into the little blue-and-white morning-room and sat down.

"Thank heaven I have it to bear, not Kathy," she said to herself with a sensation of relief. It was her own trouble; Kathy was safe.

She had known there was something which Garthe had shrunk from telling her, but her imagination, when it had exercised itself upon his past, had worked only along the channels of what roused her pity and sympathy. She had no experience which made her suspect wrong, and even when he had made allusion to his own faults she had felt a strong impulse to vindicate him as if against himself. This clear illumination put everything into a new aspect, and ran like a fire over his every hint and suggestion, making them lurid, giving a terrific meaning to his confession that there had been something in his life which had separated him from any thoughts of happiness.

She had returned hastily, intending to write a note at the desk in the alcove, and then go out

again. She had heard voices in the drawing-room, and, supposing it to be some ordinary visitor, had not thought of being curious as to her personality, or of any necessity for either listening to the conversation or avoiding it. To her surprise she had, the moment she sat down, heard Lawrence Garthe's name mentioned; then there came this disclosure. She hated the secret, she hated the way she had heard the secret. All her feelings, instincts, faculties gathered into one pulsation, which made her say to herself with a swift outleap of indignation, offended pride, almost of disgust, "He ought to have told me."

Whatever his early married experience had been, however painful, however possibly shameful, she had supposed it ended by death, - that sanctification of mortal conflict, that final pause to the most restless insurrection against fate. Yet all the time the woman who had made all his history was alive, was young, rich, almost beautiful, triumphantly moving on in a career which no doubt satisfied herself, answered her own ambitions. She had reasserted her power over Garthe; she had been his wife, she was the mother of his child; she had claimed her place in his house, and he had yielded it. If there were some brutality implied in her coming here to clear up any doubt or uncertainty concerning the true position of Lawrence Garthe, it was perhaps a necessary, an inevitable brutality, inherent in the nature of the circumstances, and not the woman's own fault.

For under the shock of feeling which had shattered her own dream-world, the announcement which Kathleen had so scornfully rejected, Constance, with a fuller sense of its significance, had instantly accepted, - accepted while tingling under the humiliation of the blow and the pain of the sting. In the bewilderment of finding herself so terribly in the wrong, it seemed burned and bitten into her consciousness that she had perhaps seemed an obstacle in the way of the easy adjustment of conflicting claims. She knew by the woman's tone and look that she was cruel, that she had taken vindictive pleasure in spoiling and trampling down whatever opposed her, yet acquiesced in the ruthless spoliation, finding it impossible to take up arms against her. She forced herself to dwell upon every detail of the woman's confession, giving each hint its fullest meaning. Of course, she said to herself with intense exaltation of feeling, it was the only way; so long as that woman had existence she must have a place in those two lives; she could not be barred out. No woman could have been Lawrence Garthe's wife without loving him, without accepting him as an ideal beyond any other possible ideal. She forced herself to think, with all the vivid picturing of which she was capable, of what their lives must have been together, - of the memories they had in common, - of their mutual

relation to the child. For Constance, with her own impressions of Lawrence Garthe, — of his expressive glance which seemed to fasten upon her and read her thoughts, his voice which had thrilled and awakened her, reaching deep-lying fibres of feeling which no one else had ever moved, — applying to these different circumstances the same motive and the same feeling, saw him, in imagination, meeting Bella as he had met herself, and saw Bella responding with the fervor of fresh and unspoiled emotion.

What wonder then that the girl shrank, recoiled, longed to hide herself? That her mind, moving confusedly backward, saw her most trivial action in a terrible light? That she remembered how, with all her thoughts running in one groove, she had speculated on the chances of his caring for Kathy, had gone out of her way to reach him, to encourage him, to draw him on? He had never misled her, - he had always told her that he had long felt an alien, - cut off from the happiness of every-day life. Such thoughts came swiftly and insistently. Her active fancy wrought on her vision of Garthe and the mother of his little boy, until she saw him now as a man who has escaped shipwreck and stands on firm ground again, full of boundless gratitude. She rejoiced, she said, she must rejoice, but she experienced a chill loneliness, a throbbing pain, and her strength fell short of the task she allotted to it.

It was still early on the following day when Lawrence Garthe's card was brought to Constance with the message that he hoped she would be good enough to see him for five minutes. John Marchmont had breakfasted with them, then had taken Kathleen out for a walk, and Constance was alone in the morning-room, her strength spent by the painful mental struggle which had kept her awake all night. She started to her feet, trembling at the news that Garthe was within reach of her, with an impulse almost of indignation. She had been thinking of him as separated from her forever, and, as a stranger who had appealed to her sympathy, she could make just allowance for him, could reason dispassionately about this unforeseen crisis of his life which had laid fresh obligations on him. But to stand before him, to meet his eyes, to hear his voice, was to impose too hard a necessity upon her strength. She trembled at the thought of it,she was afraid of the coercion she was always under in his presence. That the coercion was strong, or that the first feeling of terror was subsiding and leaving more and more room in her mind for active thought of what this crisis might mean in Lawrence Garthe's own life, making her sympathetic and helpful, instead of inclined to stand aloof, was evident, when, after standing for a few moments pressing her palms to her temples in indecision, she turned suddenly and walked slowly downstairs and into the drawing-room.

Garthe, holding Larry by the hand, was standing near the door. Their eyes met a moment, then without other greeting he said:—

"This is my boy; I have brought him to see you."

He led the little fellow up to Constance, who took the child's hand in hers, stooped, looked into the cherub face, and then, sitting down, lifted him upon her lap. If tears had gathered, if a sob choked her, it was because the fixed sadness in Garthe's look and tone had seemed to cut him off from hope.

Larry gazed back at her solemnly.

"Papa," he whispered in an awed voice, "she is crying."

"I did not mean to cry, Larry," she said, kissing him. "I am very glad to see you. I have heard a great deal about you. Your papa has told me."

Garthe, standing near and looking down at them both, laid a hand on each of the child's shoulders.

"This is the dear lady, Larry," he said, "of whom I spoke to you last Sunday. She had promised to be your mamma and my wife. Since then your own poor mother, who is alive, who left you and me years ago, who has hitherto been content to live a life apart from us both, has come back into your life. It is your great misfortune, Larry, and mine as well."

He was watching Constance's face as he spoke. "I see," he said, "that you know."

- "Yes," she answered as if under compulsion, "I know."
- "You understand now why I could not bring myself on the instant to tell you."
  - "I understand it all."
  - "You feel that I deceived you"-

She made a little gesture as if to silence him, but he went on. "You see me now a detected impostor,— a schemer, who concealed facts to suit his own purpose,— who ought before he approached you to have let you understand that a fatality kept us apart."

She had gathered Larry into her arms more closely, and, holding him there, leaned forward and looked up with her brave child's face, and said with a sob:—

"I did feel for a moment,—when I heard,—that I wished you had trusted me more completely. You told me we were friends, yet you kept me in the dark about your history,—locked it up in silence"—

A shudder ran through him.

"The thing was abhorrent to me, — abhorrent," he said in a low voice. "I could not speak of it. I could never get used to it even in my own thoughts." He walked away a few steps hurriedly, then returned. "I could by an effort of will reason myself into the belief that the matter was easy and simple. I could think to myself that the circumstances were not unusual, that they must have

occurred in thousands of cases,—that they offered no real impediment, that I was free before God and man. I could think what blessedness it would be if I could win you. I could say to myself that—that if you would consent to love me I might yet prove myself not altogether unworthy; yet all the time I was oppressed by the consciousness that the tie was there, that nothing could alter or break it, that it was an irremediable fact, that I had with open eyes made my fate for myself and must bear the penalty; only, Constance, from the moment my eyes fell on you, I loved you, loved you."

"It was my fault," she said hurriedly. "I blame myself." The expression of her face as she looked up, with its yearning of sympathy, gripped his heart.

"Your fault!" he repeated, with half-amused irony. "Of course it was your fault." He paused a moment, and his eyes devoured her face; then he went on hurriedly: "I went away from you last Sunday in a mood fit for Heaven. Still the presentiment must have been in my mind, for I dreamed of her, dreamed of her hideously. Then the next night I went home, and there she was planted at my fireside. . . . I have said to myself a hundred times since that if I had had the will, the nerve, the courage of a man, if I had not been a coward, I should have sent her away on the instant, or at least have taken Larry in my arms and left

her to her barren triumph. But I faltered with a fear of being cruel, - I dallied, I waited to see how events would turn. I have sometimes, in living over and over again every detail of my life with her, confessed to myself that perhaps I had been overhasty and harsh. Accordingly, now I was the more constrained to say, 'She is Larry's mother; it would be cruel to forbid her the right to see the child,' and - and she had the softness, the allurement which disarms a man, - makes him feel that a woman is a tenderer thing than himself. Besides, - but no matter, the fact remains, I did not drive her out. She sat down at my hearth, she had a place opposite me at table, she talked and frolicked with the boy, - drew his head to her breast, made a domestic picture, - with a tact, a skill of which I should not have believed her capable, pretended to feel regret, repentance, remorse, - she even told me of her aspirations to come back and try it all over again. It was all a bribe to my love for Larry."

The boy—a little constrained and ill at ease, feeling, too, that the clasp upon him was relaxed, as his father leaned towards the girl in his low-toned explanation, broken every now and then by an intonation which seemed like a smothered cry, his face pale, his eyes full of anguish—had crept away and was kneeling before a cabinet at a little distance. There were idols, and strange carvings; a wonderful dragon, too, which moved under his

touch like a thing of life, with scales of gold and silver, and eyes of sparkling gems. He uttered a startled exclamation as the creature seemed to coil itself and spring.

"Look!" he cried, but Garthe and Constance, both pale, with trembling lips, were gazing at each other, and saw nothing.

She was looking at him, feeling the need of speech, but yet could hardly bring her stiffened lips to utter a syllable. He saw the struggle in her face and waited; he took her hand gently between his, saying, soothingly:—

"What is it, dear one?"

She did not repulse him, but looked at him, and let him fold both his hands over hers. A little tremor passed over her face, a few tears gathered, then she could falter out, —

"Lawrence, if she loved you, — if she trusted you, — if "—

He looked into her face wonderingly.

"She did not love me, — she did not trust me. She is a woman whose heart is snares and nets."

"But — but," whispered Constance, "you your-self just said that nothing could alter the fact, and if — for Larry's sake"—

He had dropped her hands; he stood erect, and looked down at her with a look as if his whole soul were wrung.

"Would you condemn me to that fate?" he asked.

"If she loved you, — if she trusted you, — if she longed to atone" — said Constance, unable to raise her eyes, yet filled with the need of expressing all that had been in her heart and mind since yesterday, — believing, too, that the irrevocable had happened — that the turning-point in their lives had come, and that Garthe's mission to-day was to vindicate his course to her. Although she could not look up, she could stretch out her arms at full length in an attitude of beseeching. "I am sure she had been very unhappy."

Garthe came a little nearer.

"Let me tell you what happened," he said quietly. "The night was snowy, there was a raging tempest,—she could not go away, and finally I did what I might better have done at first,—I walked straight out of the house into the drifts and the cutting wind. I would not be entrapped."

She looked up at him, painfully silenced, yet not comprehending anything except that she must in no way do injustice even to the woman for whom she felt an instinct of unsurmountable aversion and dread.

"I had neither hat nor cloak," he pursued, with a half laugh, "and it was almost a matter of surprise, when after walking a quarter of a mile, I came to a hotel which still showed lights; I was admitted, and given a room. I went into it and sat down. Whether I was cold or warm, wet or dry, I do not know; I only remember that I felt stifled and

suffocated, and missed the cool beat of the sleet upon my face. It did not occur to me to go to bed, — still there was a benumbing mist over my faculties; I could not think coherently, or realize, except by effort, what the real situation was. I said then, audibly, I think, 'I am under the ban, — I have lost Constance. We can never be married.'"

He stopped short. Constance had made a gesture.

"Of course," she said brokenly, "you had a feeling that I—that it somehow concerned me—but let all that go. Of course, it could not be,—it belonged to another condition of things. You have said over and over that the feeling—for me—had come upon you unawares,—that even when you tried to make it seem easy and natural you had felt that a fatality separated us."

"Not if you loved me, — not if you would venture to give yourself to me," said Garthe in a clear, tender tone, and with a glance which penetrated to her very soul, and which gave her the feeling of being compelled against her will to lay bare her deepest consciousness.

"I could not, —I could not, —I ought not, —it would not be right," she cried, urged by a necessity of leaving him free to act, no matter at what cost to herself. "I did not know, —I could not guess, —I feel that you belong to your old life, unalterably; and you have almost said in so many words that in finding her there you felt your old love for her return."

"No, no, no; a thousand times, no," he cried out almost fiercely.

"She is a beautiful woman," said Constance

quietly.

"She is a beautiful woman, I admit," replied Garthe. "Let me resolve as I might, all through these six years, never to think of her, still the idea haunted me that she was young, that life might be cruel to her. It was a relief to see that she had not suffered, rather had developed beyond expectation. But as for loving her," he went on, "rather I hated her, or more truly I might say that I felt insulted, humiliated, that she had somehow contrived to develop, improve, attain wealth, ease, position. Her soft white hands, laden with rings, the diamonds at her throat, the fit of her gown, — the way she stood, sat, smiled, spoke, — each was an added insult; it galled me, — it stung me, — it represented all I rejected, repudiated."

His breathing was quick and painful; his face was flushed, his eyes burning. Every word he uttered seemed to oppress and torture him.

"He loves her," Constance said within herself, her own face crimsoning, a wave of intense feeling passing through her. "He loves her still, as a man can love but once." Then she said aloud:—

"But she still feels that her life is bound up in yours."

"How do you know?" he demanded, turning on her quickly.

- "She was here yesterday," said Constance.
- "You saw her? She spoke to you? It was she who communicated the facts?"
- "It was to Kathy she spoke. There was some mistake."

He uttered a passionate exclamation, stood for an instant looking down at her, then walked to a little distance and stood as if rooted to the floor. It seemed to her that he was very angry, but presently he spoke with perfect self-control.

"She had, perhaps, heard that I wished to marry you, but confounded your identity with that of Mrs. Garner."

"Evidently," Constance murmured, shrinking.

"It is as if I had committed a crime," he said with bitter irony. "I am chained to it, I cannot rid myself of it; my whole life is irremediably spoiled by it."

"It need not be irremediably spoiled," she said gently.

His eyes searched her face.

- "You mean that" -
- "I mean that she loves you, trusts you, wishes to atone," said Constance, using again the same formula of words she had used before. "It is possible for you to be happy yet."

He gave her a strange glance.

"Let me tell you," he said quietly, "what else happened Monday night, or rather Tuesday morning. At first, when she had, as it were, made a bid for Larry, I had been too angry, too stupefied to feel certain of what I actually thought about the matter. Sometimes, as I sat there, rigid as a dead man, it occurred to me that since I was, of course, unalterably separated from you, the course she suggested might be the very best thing. For myself, what did anything matter? For Larry, it might simplify the facts of every-day existence not to be separated from his mother. Thus my mind, conscious only of a terrible dreariness, of the quenching of the spark of hope I had been walking by, of the victory of darkness over light, groped on in its despair. But finally, with the first glimpse of the rose of dawn, with a star shining above the arch in the east, I at last saw clearly; I would die before I ever again had part or lot with that woman. My first duty was to get Larry away from that wild beast ambushed in my house. As soon as I could procure a conveyance, I went for my little son and took him with me."

"See, papa!" cried Larry in triumph, having by this time mastered the dragon, and holding him in a fast grasp.

"Come, dear, we must go," said Garthe. He took hold of the boy's hand and went up to Constance. "I do not know what I can say," he murmured, "except good-by, and to ask you to forgive me for bringing anything painful and disagreeable into your life."

She put out both hands with a sort of sob.

"I have vexed you," she said, in a broken voice, "and yet"—

"Yet you consider everything over between us,
— that so long as she lives she separates me from
any other possible life?"

She was conscious of the question in his eyes, and cowered.

"Kiss Larry, will you not?" said Garthe gently. She drew the child to her, clasped him in her arms, looking into his wondering, loving face, and said softly: "Good-by, dear."

Tears overcame her; when she looked up again they were gone. She rose and walked towards the door. It seemed to her that she must say one word more or her heart would break. She put aside the curtains and looked out, but no one was to be seen except a servant, who approached her with the message that a lady had come in while she was engaged with her visitor and was waiting for her upstairs in the morning-room.

It flashed across the mind of Constance instantly that this must be the alienated wife, come anew with some request for mediation, some petition for help. In spite of her wish to undo any possible wrong she had done, and to avert any fresh mistake, her instinctive feeling towards the woman who made calamity of Lawrence Garthe's life was of dread. How could she meet her? She hated to think of her against the background of the peaceful blue-and-white room, as she approached it.

The thought of the ordeal gave her courage against the pain she was suffering, and she entered the place with a look of heightened resolution; then, catching a glimpse of her visitor, who had risen, she exclaimed:—

"Miss Shepard?"

"Yes, I am Eugenia Shepard," said the other, clasping her hand. "Will you forgive me for coming in this way? I heard you had a visitor, and I wished particularly to see you alone, not even with Mrs. Garner."

"She has gone out. I am not sure when she will be back," said Constance, with eagerly awakened conjectures as to what the visit must mean. Miss Shepard's connection with that other person suddenly loomed up with more or less of threat in it.

"May I close the door?" the visitor asked.

Constance instantly acted on the suggestion, and stood waiting, her whole face kindled with some feeling which seemed almost like defiance.

There was a moment's silence; Miss Shepard, looking at the girl, was conscious that her young heart must be beating with some strange excitement.

"You know," she said abruptly, "that I have been living with Mrs. Hernandez as companion, secretary, what not?"

"I have heard it."

"You will comprehend that there is little of

Mrs. Hernandez' history with which I am unacquainted."

"I can readily believe it if you say so," said Constance calmly.

"I have come to tell you that she was married to Mr. Ferdinand Hartley at nine o'clock this morning, and that at eleven o'clock they sailed for Europe. I drove here from the wharf after seeing them off."

"Married to Mr. Hartley?" Constance repeated mechanically, growing intensely pale and her eyes full of dismay.

"Yes; will you tell Mrs. Garner this piece of news, which may or may not interest her? Of course it will be in the evening paper, but I felt it best to come and give it to her myself, or rather to beg you to do so."

"Married to Mr. Hartley?" Constance reiterated, as if still incredulous.

"This final climax was sudden," exclaimed Miss Shepard, "but it did not surprise me. She has been for weeks wavering on the verge of a decision to accept Mr. Hartley, going forward and back, but I felt that some end like this was inevitable."

She was startled by a change of color in the face of the girl before her, and by her confused movement backward as if reaching out blindly for a chair. She flung her arm about the slender figure, but in a moment Constance had regained her self-command.

"May I sit down?" she asked with a euriously humble intonation. "I am not quite well to-day."

She looked at Miss Shepard, mute, but her eyes were full of questions for which she could not easily find words. "I do not quite understand," she said after this silence in which she seemed to have been groping for some clue. "Mrs. Hernandez was here yesterday"—

"It was that circumstance which brought me here to-day," said Miss Shepard angrily. "From what she told me of her visit to Mrs. Garner I felt sure that she had tried to make trouble,—to meddle between her and Mr. Garthe. She had heard that they were engaged."

Miss Shepard's eyes sought Constance's face questioningly.

"Mrs. Garner's engagement to Mr. John Marchmont is already announced to our friends," said Constance quietly and proudly.

"Then she was misled by a false rumor. In any case, since she came to this house, I felt it my duty to make things clear. She tried to do harm, she endeavored to give a false impression. She is not absolutely without conscience unless an impulse possesses her, then she is ruthless. When the fancy seizes her that she wishes to do a certain thing, she lets herself be run away by it regardless of consequences. She never repents, — she does not know what repentance means. It is enough for her to dismiss the idea of what she has done,

— to say that the past is past, — then she troubles herself no more about it. She remarked to me this morning that she had burned all her ships behind her, and should never think of her life in New York again, for she hated it." Eugenia's tone was abrupt and scornful.

There was silence again.

"I do not wish to speak ill of her," she went on again with fresh impetuosity. "In her way she has been good to me. Without her I should have missed my opportunity. Not that I was wholly egoistic, - wholly sordid. I believed in her at first. I believed there was a strength in her, - a touch of greatness, a sort of dramatic force which might be developed, — might be the means of raising others. I used to be certain that I could bring her to different views of life from those which had hitherto actuated her, - could make her feel that her experience had been an education, a preparation for a high mission." There had been an eager vindication of herself in her tone; now she uttered a short, harsh laugh. "I was deceived. She is a woman whom nothing can bind, - any tie is something to fling away the moment it becomes a burden."

Constance rose with a sudden swift movement, and put her hand on the other's arm. "Tell me," she said hastily, "if she spoke to you about going to see Mr. Garthe."

"She told me the entire story. You see, Miss

Garner, it has been her habit to pour everything out to me; she said I was her conscience-keeper. From the moment she heard that Mr. Garthe was in New York, there was a new, fierce restlessness about her. She talked of him incessantly; her mind seemed perfectly taken possession of by the thought of him; she cared for nothing else. Do you know him well?" Miss Shepard added, pausing abruptly in her narration and flinging out this question.

A consuming blush rose to Constance's pale face. Her lips quivered, her eyes brimmed over.

"Yes," she said, shaken by a strange agitation.

"Do I need to justify him to you?" asked Eugenia again.

"No, no; I believe in him from the bottom of my soul," cried Constance, with a new intensity in her face and tone.

"I asked," Eugenia said very softly, "because it has been my own experience that even where human lives meet most closely, painful and pitiful alienation sometimes happens because the truth is not made clear. The real substance and meaning of things eludes, but leaves the misleading husk in our hands. So if you had any doubt of Mr. Garthe"-

"I have none, not the slightest," cried Constance, as if she might in this way atone for a momentary perfidy. "If," she went on with more agitation in her voice, "I believed for a moment what she said about her wish to return to him "-

"She return to him?" repeated Miss Shepard. "Every spark of feeling she had ever felt or Mr. Garthe had turned into a wish to sting him, to torture him. She was still jealous, but it was a savage instinct; it had no touch of love in t. If he had yielded to her, shown her the least ouch of the old feeling, she would have derided it, aughed it to scorn."

The expression of Constance's face almost tartled her: she saw in it something that was nalf joy and half terror, a clear relief, as if some great dread had passed, and yet a sorrow which had to be accepted and borne.

"I have meddled enough in affairs which do not concern me," Miss Shepard now said with plenty of lecision. "I must go; if I have intruded"—

"You have been most kind, most helpful," said Constance. "If I have seemed ungrateful, it is only that my thoughts have been absorbed by what you have told me. I thank you sincerely."

"Then I have only to say good-by," said Miss Shepard, looking once more into the girl's pale ace, then going out, down the stairs and into the street, with a feeling that the trouble she saw in Constance's eyes was one that no third person could directly touch.

## CHAPTER XX.

## AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN.

Some months later Constance left the hotel at Mürren one afternoon where she was staying with Mr. and Mrs. John Marchmont, who, having been married soon after Easter, had come abroad for the summer, bringing her with them. It had been a transition time with her; everything old and precious had been waning, and nothing new and enduring had yet waxed to fullness. She had never seen Lawrence Garthe since he had brought Larry to her on that strange morning long ago, and had only heard from him in a hasty note explaining that he had suddenly decided to join a party of scientists going to South America. She had written in reply, but he had not answered, and his silence had been painful. But she felt that she deserved the pain.

She left the hotel, walking along the precipice above the gorge under the grim shadow of the Mönch, descending into the dell, then climbing the steep ascent to the ridges which dominated the high meadow lands, where peasants in Bernese costume were making hay in picturesque fashion. As she toiled up the last narrow path rudely paved, she

met a little girl flying down the steps, her face lighted up with the joy of her own daring, and her blonde hair floating behind in the wind. Constance loved all children in these days; she caught the little creature in her arms and kissed her twice.

Just this pause was needed to detain her and keep her in sight, and give the direction to the man who was following her. Gaining the fragrant pasture above, the girl sat down, her heart and her eyes open to the glory of the great snow peaks, which heaved up their dazzling heads and shoulders against the blue sky. Gazing at them, she half reclined along the rock. All about her was a bed of flowers, familiar, yet eloquently strange when found at home here — campanulas, velvety, purplish-black pansies with golden eyes, bluest forget-me-nots, great silver-gray thistles, violets, and saxifrage of every hue. From behind the ridge came the sound of a cascade, and from all sides the tinkle of cowbells and the occasional pipe of a goatsherd.

It was here that Lawrence Garthe overtook her. He had met Mr. Marchmont, and had heard that Constance was wandering somewhere on the high fragrant pasture lands. Presently, when he thought she had studied out the ice-bound peaks of the Oberland, he put his hand on her broad-brimmed hat.

She looked up; she would have started to her feet, but he stooped, his arm was around her, and he knelt beside her. Still he did not speak, but he drew her towards him and their lips met.

"You took me by surprise," she said hastily, and moved away a little.

"I saw you kiss the little maiden," Garthe observed, smiling. "She did not care for the kiss as I did, so I took it from her and gave her a franc for it."

He looked at her. "Constance," he murmured, "is it still impossible for you to believe in me?"

"I always believed in you," she said passionately. "I could not have gone on living all these months, unless I believed in you."

She extended her little bare, trembling hand.

He clasped it. "Your letter reached me three weeks ago," he said, — "the letter in which you asked me to leave Larry with you when I went to South America."

She drew a deep breath.

"It has altered all these months for me," he said, "that I missed it. It would have given me great happiness to have had the assurance that you cared for Larry, for you knew all the time that we were one and indivisible. If you wanted him, you wanted me."

"Where is Larry now?" she struggled to say.

"At Zürich; I have often left him there before with some worthy people. I received your letter at Lima. It filled me with I know not what hopes,—it made me frantic to see you. I returned to New York as soon as I could, found out that you were abroad, and probably in Switzerland. I

sailed the next day for Bremen, and now for a week I have been following you and the Marchmonts about from place to place." He leaned towards her. The shadow of the broad-brimmed hat hid the upper part of her face; he could only see the lips and chin.

"Look at me," he said, "I want to see if you forgive me"—

"Forgive you?" said Constance in a broken voice. They said no more; they sat with clasped hands, finding no words to utter, and needing none.









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